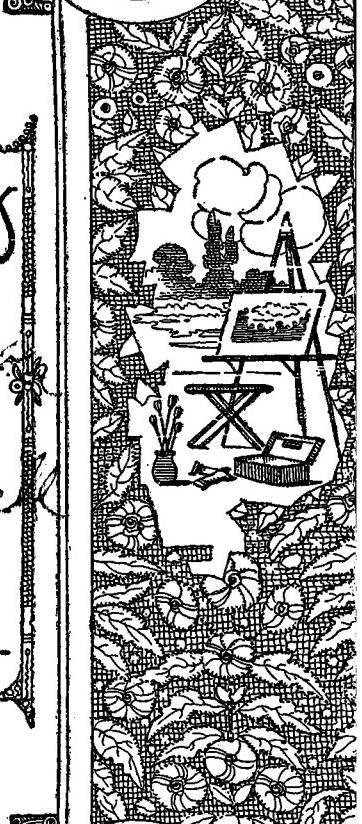
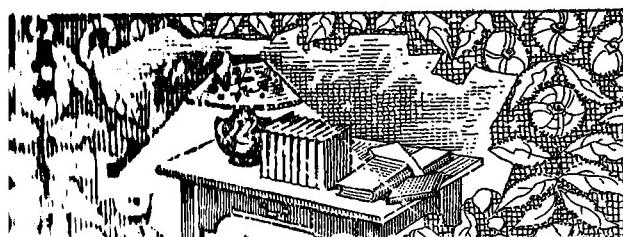
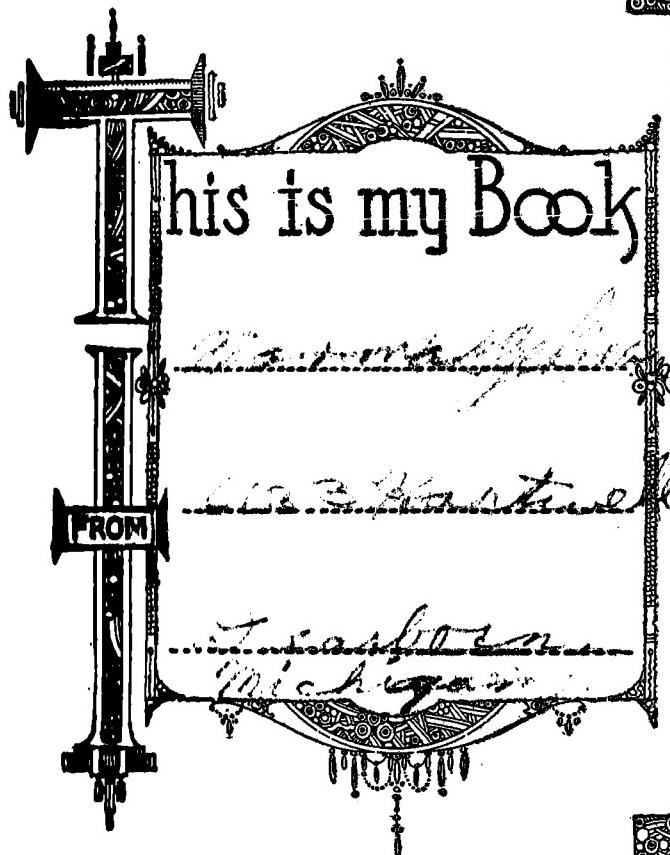
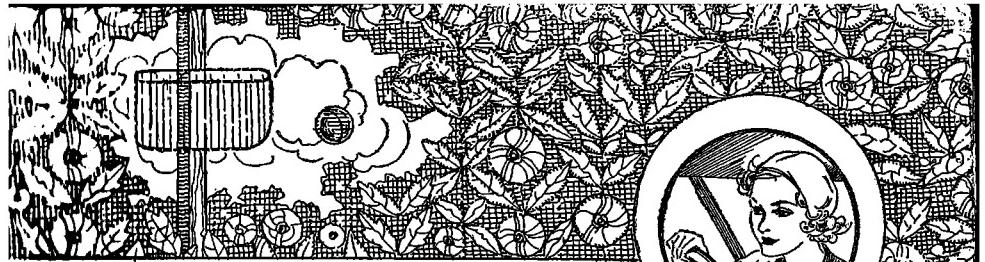


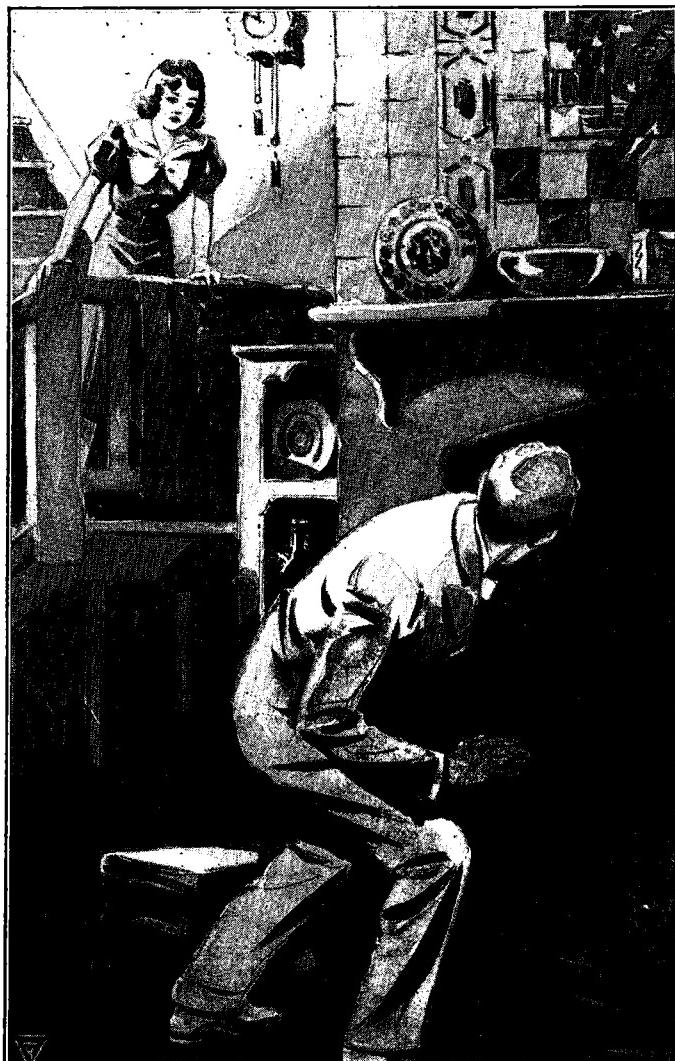
THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY

MILDRED A. WIRT



Now - Yesterday





CROUCHING DOWN, HE GAZED FAR UP INTO THE
SMOKE CHAMBER.

"The Wooden Shoe Mystery"

(See page 76)

The Wooden Shoe Mystery

BY

MILDRED A. WIRT

Author of

THE TWIN RING MYSTERY
THE CLUE AT CROOKED LANE
THE HOLLOW WALL MYSTERY
THE SHADOW STONE
THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

ILLUSTRATED



CUPPLES AND LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

MILDRED A. WIRT MYSTERY STORIES

Large 12 mo. cloth illustrated

THE CLUE AT CROOKED LANE

THE HOLLOW WALL MYSTERY

THE SHADOW STONE

THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY

THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

Other titles in preparation

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—
THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY
—

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

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THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

FOUND IN A PUMPKIN

"AM I late, girls?"

Patty Rose Saunders, a slim, freckled girl of fourteen in moth-eaten sweater, mussed blue slacks and stout hiking shoes, called out the question as she ran up the steps of the Harborg residence.

"No, you're just in time," answered Gladys Baker, one of the twenty girls who had gathered on the front porch. "But where in the world did you find that crazy outfit? You must have borrowed it from the rag picker!"

"No, from my brother," Patty replied with a careless laugh. "Mrs. Harborg's invitation said to bring my flashlight and come dressed in old clothes. I did my best to obey the instructions."

"At that you're the most sensible one in the crowd," declared another of her friends. "The last time I attended a treasure-hunt party I ripped a heel off my pumps and tore my best silk dress."

Patty pushed aside a lock of auburn hair which

stubbornly insisted upon peeping from beneath her jaunty blue beret. She said banteringly: "I only overlooked one thing, girls. I should have brought along an old-gunny sack for the treasure I mean to find!"

Mrs. Harborg, the plump, genial hostess, appeared on the porch, requesting the young people to come into the living room for a moment.

"Girls," she said pleasantly, "you all know the rules of this little game. Not far from here I have hidden a tiny treasure chest, and after I give you your first clue you are to search for it in couples. The contents of the chest will become the property of the two girls who first locate it. Do you all have partners?"

Patty Rose squeezed the hand of Gladys Baker as she whispered:

"Let's slip over toward the door. Then we'll be ready to dash out of here the minute Mrs. Harborg reads the clue."

"Are you all ready?" inquired the hostess, unfolding a sheet of paper. "The clues are in rhyme. Here is the first. Listen carefully:

"A tiger lily shall disclose
The very spot that no one knows;
For not in vain the poet sings
Of "stepping stones to higher things."'"

Immediately there was an excited babble of voices as twenty girls tried to determine the hidden mean-

▲

ing of the little verse. Several whose memories were not retentive pleaded with Mrs. Harborg to repeat.

Patty grasped her partner by the hand, pulling her out into the yard ahead of the others.

"Under one of the stepping stones!" she whispered gaily. "That's where we should find the next clue."

Taking their cue from Patty and Gladys, other girls followed them to the garden at the rear of the Harborg house. The searchers flashed their lights upon a veritable maze of stepping stones. A circle of odd shaped rocks led from the rear veranda to the lily pool, while another trailed past the garden toward the rose arbor.

"There must be a million stones," Gladys murmured in dismay. "Which one can the verse mean?"

Several of the girls were running to and fro, trying to lift the stones to learn if one were loose. Patty Rose did not follow those who swarmed near the lily pool. Instead she gazed carefully about, flashing her light into dark nooks of the perennial border.

"We must find a tiger lily—not the kind that floats in a pool," she whispered to her companion. "Yes, and here it is, right beside a stepping stone too!"

"Can you lift it?"

Patty tugged at the stone and to her delight discovered that it raised readily. The beam of her flashlight revealed ten neatly folded papers lying underneath. According to the rules of the treasure-hunt

game, the girls could take only one slip and must leave the others.

Not wishing to be seen by her competitors, Patty seized a folded paper, and quickly lowered the stone into position.

"Let's read it around behind the garage," she whispered to Gladys. "We'll pretend to be searching."

The other girls were too engrossed in their own hunt to heed Patty and Gladys as the pair moved stealthily away. Shielded by the garage, they switched on their flashlight again to peer at the typewritten verse:

"Now near a corn shock we devise
A place secure from prying eyes;
But answer this and you'll be wise—
What filling is the best for pies?"

"This is really a hard one, Gladys. What do you make of it?"

"Absolutely nothing," Gladys rejoined hopelessly. "I never was clever at this sort of thing."

"Well, it's fairly obvious that our next clue must be hidden somewhere near a shock of corn, but where will we find one—that's what I can't figure."

"Why, on a farm, silly," Gladys retorted. "Isn't that where corn grows?"

"What I should have said was how will we find the right farm. There are so many."

Patty knew the little city of Dalton and its environs intimately. There were few persons among its ten thousand inhabitants with whom she was unacquainted for she made friends readily. Turning the matter over in her mind she took mental note of all the farms near the city limits.

"Old Mr. Brighton has a place at the north edge of town," she said, half-aloud. "But the last time I went past there I didn't notice a corn field."

"Yes, and Joe Eckert has a small farm at the south of Dalton too," Gladys contributed. "He raises chickens mostly but he has a little cornfield as well."

"Then let's try the Eckert place."

Scarcely had the girls darted from the Harborg yard when a gleeful shout warned them that another couple had discovered the clue under the stepping stone.

"We have the head start anyway," chuckled Patty. "We'll find the treasure first if our luck holds."

"If our breath does, you mean," gasped Gladys, trying to keep pace with her fleet-footed friend. "My! You run like a champion sprinter!"

Hand in hand the girls scurried down the street, past a comfortable two-story brick house on the corner of Milburn Avenue which was Patty's home, on beyond the public library and the spacious grounds of the Dalton High school where both girls attended classes.

They came at last to the Eckert farm, an untidy

patch of land near the Comanche river. Where the city sidewalk ended a weed-grown trail led on toward the farmhouse lane. As the girls moved along it single file their shoes were showered with dew.

"The cornfield is at the rear of the house," Gladys indicated. "From here it looks as if it hadn't been cut yet."

A light burned in the farmhouse, and as the girls approached, a vicious dog came out from his bed under the porch to growl menacingly. While Patty and Gladys hesitated, a farmer appeared in the doorway, gazing suspiciously out into the darkness.

"Who's there?" he called sharply.

The girls stepped forward into the rectangle of light which shone through the open door. Mr. Eckert, upon observing that they could not be chicken thieves, sternly commanded the dog to be quiet. Patty saw plainly that the farmer disapproved of such nocturnal visits and tried to explain about Mrs. Harborg's party and their urgent search for a shock of corn.

"My field isn't even cut," said Mr. Eckert in a voice that chilled the girls with its unfriendly tone. "You'll not find a stack of corn on the place."

Disappointed, the girls retreated down the rutty lane where they were brought up short by Mr. Eckert's booming voice:

"If you see the rest of your friends tell 'em not to

come around here looking for shocks of corn. I can't have folks tramping over the place."

"Old crosspatch!" Gladys muttered under her breath. "As if anyone could hurt this run-down farm."

"Mr. Eckert hates all young people," Patty explained. "Once years ago a couple of boys lugged off a few of his watermelons. He's afraid of chicken thieves too."

The girls had reached the sidewalk again. Gladys suggested rather half-heartedly that they might as well abandon the search and return to the Harborg home where supper would be served.

"Why, we're only starting our hunt for the treasure chest," Patty protested. "We'll make up for lost time. The others may be having their difficulties too."

"Where shall we go from here?"

"We might try the Brighton place."

"It's at the opposite end of town," Gladys complained wearily, "and we'll never get ahead of the other girls after wasting so much time. Besides, my feet are tired."

"Any other reasons?" Patty asked with a laugh.

"Yes, come to think of it, there is an important one. And it concerns you too."

"Don't talk in riddles, Gladys. This treasure hunt is enough of a puzzle."

"We're going to Pelma tomorrow to attend the Dutch festival!"

"Oh, Gladys, aren't you the lucky person!" Patty cried. "I've always wanted to go, but I've never had an opportunity. How I envy you."

"You needn't," her friend laughed. "Mother said I could invite you. I must get up early in the morning for there will be loads of work to do before we start."

"I'll ask Mother if I may go," Patty said enthusiastically. "But let's not abandon the treasure hunt now. Losing a little sleep won't hurt either of us."

Gladys allowed herself to be persuaded and they set forth on the quest again. A long block brought them to the residence of Doctor Kirkman, and a light burning in the garage told Patty Rose that the physician was just starting out on a night call.

"Maybe he's going our way and will give us a ride," she cried jubilantly.

Gladys, always inclined to be timid, hesitated to make such a request, fearing that some patient might be in urgent need of medical attention.

"Oh, I'm certain it's no emergency case," Patty reassured her. "When Doctor Kirkman is in a great hurry his car always shoots down the driveway as if it had been projected from a cannon."

"I'm afraid to ask him."

"Well, I'm not. He took out my tonsils and he set my brother's jaw when the horse kicked him, so I guess I have some rights!"

The doctor's car coasted leisurely down the gravel drive.

"Hello, girls," he called with a friendly wave of his hand. "Aren't you a long ways from home?"

"Entirely too far to suit us," Patty answered wearily. "We've been searching all evening for a shock of corn."

Doctor Kirkman applied the footbrake, regarding her as if he were certain he had misunderstood. Knowing that she had a sympathetic listener in the doctor, Patty again explained about Mrs. Harborg's party and the treasure hunt.

"Jump in and I'll take you directly to the Brighton farm," he invited, swinging open the door and removing his black bag from the seat. "It's on my way."

"Oh, thank you, Doctor Kirkman," Patty said gratefully. And as the car bore them away, she inquired hopefully: "In your travels I don't suppose you've noticed any shocks of corn close to Dalton?"

"You're on the right track this time I think," the doctor smiled, turning the car north. "I happened to see Mrs. Harborg at the Brighton place early this afternoon. I couldn't imagine what she was doing out in the cornfield unless she were buying a few pumpkins."

This was good news indeed and Patty gave her friend's arm a little squeeze of understanding as they cuddled closer together in the big mohair seat.

As the car climbed a steep hill, the girls saw two of the treasure-hunt searchers hurrying along the walk, and guessed that they too were on their way to the Brighton farm. Patty and Gladys promptly ducked down out of sight and were not observed.

At the outskirts of the little city, the doctor stopped the car to let out his young passengers.

"Oh, thank you, Doctor Kirkman," said Patty as she gazed toward the cornfield which bordered the road. "You don't happen to remember which shock of corn Mrs. Harborg was near? It would save us a lot of time if you could recall."

"She was near the fence," the doctor answered, indicating one of wooden rails which bisected the corn patch. "Over that way."

The car sped on leaving the girls to survey the Brighton farm which drowsed hazily beneath a mellow autumn moon. Only the chirp of crickets and an occasional deep-throated croak of a frog disturbed the tranquillity of the night.

Patty and her companion ran toward the old rail fence. They beheld a dozen shocks of corn, standing stiff and straight like Indian wigwams, but acting upon the doctor's hint, they directed their attention to the one nearest the fence.

As her eyes fell upon a huge yellow pumpkin at the base of a corn shock, Patty Rose gave a cry of delight and triumphantly chanted the last two lines of verse:

“‘But answer this and you’ll be wise—
What filling is the best for pies?’”

“Pumpkin of course!” Gladys exclaimed excitedly.
“Maybe the next clue is hidden underneath.”

The pumpkin was almost too heavy to lift, and when the girls did raise it, there were no folded papers under it. However, as the beam of Patty’s flashlight played over the golden surface she saw a faint square outline which told her plainly that the pumpkin had been “plugged.”

With a triumphant chuckle, she pulled out the loose section and thrusting in her hand, drew forth several folded papers. All but one she replaced.

“What does the verse say?” Gladys inquired anxiously. “I hope the search doesn’t get any harder.”

“We must be close to the treasure now! Listen to this:

“‘Now turn your steps into a wood
Where not long since an old tree stood;
But lo, the bolt that slew the tree
Will solve this baffling mystery!’”

Patty caught her friend’s hand, fairly pulling her toward the dark timber which stretched to the right of the road.

"This clue is an easy one, Gladys! The treasure must be hidden in one of the shivered cracks of an old tree—probably one that's been struck by lightning!"

The girls scrambled over the wooden rail fence and Gladys was so excited at the prospect of achieving their goal that she did not even notice when a rough splinter snagged her stocking. An automobile whizzed along the main road, the brilliant headlights momentarily illuminating a path of the dark forest.

"I don't like the idea of going in there," Gladys shivered, losing some of her enthusiasm for the adventure. "It's black as pitch."

"Darkness never hurt anyone, goosie. We have our flashlights and the splintered tree should be easy to find."

They walked bravely into the woods, moving cautiously lest they trip over unseen vines. Soon they came to a bluff which overlooked the narrow winding river.

Deciding that they were searching in the wrong direction, the girls started to retrace their steps. Then Patty suddenly halted, and her tense attitude caused her companion to remain motionless.

"What was that sound?" Patty whispered nervously.

She was certain she had heard the low murmur of voices, and wondered if other searchers had reached the timber ahead of them. Yet sober reflection convinced her that such could not be the case. She had

counted the folded slips in the pumpkin and had found ten.

Patty and her companion stood listening, and presently they heard another sound foreign to the forest—the dull thud of a spade turning up earth.

Noiselessly, the girls crept forward, wriggling through the bushes until they could look down over the bluff.

Directly below, plainly visible in the moonlight which streaked through a gap in the trees, were two men with their backs turned. They had dug a large hole, and beside them was a small square box which appeared to be made of metal.

"That's about large enough now," said one of the men gruffly. "Let's drop her in and cover it up."

For just a moment the girls wondered if they were witnessing a little tableaux which had been planned by their hostess as a climax to the treasure-hunt. They knew Mrs. Harborg prided herself upon being original. But there was a grim reality to the scene, a sinister atmosphere which could not be dissembled.

Hoping to obtain a more distinct view of the two men who were working below, the girls crept cautiously forward. Despite their care, a stick crackled underfoot, and in the eerie silence of the woods, it snapped like a fire cracker.

The two men straightened, and one muttered: "Did you hear that?"

"I'm getting out of here," said the other gruffly.

Snatching up the metal box the two men vanished beyond the trees. A minute later the girls heard the roar of a high-powered motor as an automobile sped off down the road. Then all was silent in the forest save for the persistent call of a lonely whippoorwill.

CHAPTER II

HIDDEN IN THE GLEN

THE girls, shocked by the scene they had witnessed in the glen, collected themselves slowly. Until the automobile had roared away, neither spoke, but at last Patty Rose said in an awed whisper:

"Those men were up to no good. Otherwise why did they run away?"

"You don't suppose it could have been part of the treasure hunt?"

"No—impossible. Those men were burying something, Gladys, and I'm certain it had nothing to do with Mrs. Harborg's party. I'd like to know what was in that tin box."

"Well, the men are gone now, thank goodness, but I don't feel safe here even so," Gladys answered with shiver. "Let's forget all about the treasure hunt and go back home."

Patty was tempted to agree, but curiosity overcame all feeling of uneasiness. Pulling her protesting companion along with her, she found an opening among the bushes and lowered herself over the bank and

down to the river level where the men had worked.

The discarded spade lay beside the open hole, tangible proof that the pair had fled in panic. In reaching down to pick up the implement Patty noticed another object on the ground near the hole.

"What's this?" she asked in surprise.

The beam of her flashlight revealed a tiny booklet such as she often carried herself for telephone numbers and brief memorandums.

"Here is a real clue," she said softly, "and this time it's not in verse."

"What have you found?"

Patty offered the booklet for Gladys' inspection. In thumbing through it at random they were disappointed to see only blank pages. No name appeared on the fly leaf.

"One of the men must have dropped the book," Patty declared as she slipped it into her pocket for more minute examination later on. "But I'm afraid this clue will not be of much help in identifying them."

"I wonder who they could have been?" Gladys mused. "I don't believe it was anyone living around Dalton."

After briefly examining the ground in the vicinity of the open hole, the girls climbed the bank again and retraced their way toward the Brighton farm. They had lost all interest in the treasure hunt and so were pleasantly surprised when without the slightest effort

upon their part, they came face to face with a splintered tree.

Directly across their path lay the great oak, its huge trunk blackened by the bolt of lightning which had felled it. One bough had been slit wide so that the inner wood was exposed.

"This is what I call marvelous luck!" Gladys cried in delight. "Surely this must be the spot where the treasure is hidden."

Patty's thoughts were still upon the strange scene witnessed in the glen, but the sight of the oak tree called back her enthusiasm for the treasure hunt.

Scrambling up on the tree trunk and maintaining a precarious balance by holding fast to small limbs, she reached the point where the main bough had been splintered from its parent. There in the deep crack made by the bolt of lightning, she found the object for which she searched—a small wooden chest.

"The treasure is ours, Gladys!" she cried excitedly. "We've earned it too!"

Simultaneously with her shout the girls heard other voices which came from the Brighton corn patch, telling them that their friends had arrived belatedly to find the clue contained in the pumpkin.

Triumphantly, Patty and Gladys emerged from the woods bearing the treasure chest. Their appearance was noted instantly by those in the corn field and several girls ran to meet them at the rail fence.

"Gladys, please let's not tell them about what we saw in the glen," Patty quickly warned her friend. "Not tonight at least."

"All right, I'll not even tell Mrs. Harborg," Gladys promised.

She could say no more for a group of girls swarmed to the fence, besieging them with questions. There were many dismal wails of disappointment as Gladys proudly displayed the treasure chest and told where it had been found.

"What does it contain?" asked several of the girls in one breath.

Gladys opened the lid, revealing four pair of sheer silk hose.

"I've always wanted an especially luxurious pair of chiffons," she declared, "but I never dreamed of having any as nice as these stockings. See Patty, aren't they beautiful? Two pair for you and two for me."

"Yes, they're nice," answered Patty Rose somewhat absently.

A few of her friends regarded the girl curiously, thinking that she did not like the prize. Actually, Patty's mind was not even on the stockings and in her preoccupation she scarcely heard what was said to her. She was thinking of the two strangers and their mysterious metal box.

At the Harborg home once more, the girls enjoyed a delicious supper served by their hostess, and tiny

favors at each plate offered clever consolation prizes for those who had failed in the treasure hunt. Patty made an effort to join in the festivities, but try as she might she felt relieved when the party finally broke up.

As the girls were putting on their wraps in the upstairs bedroom, Gladys drew her friend aside to speak again of the proposed trip to Pelma.

"I do hope your parents will allow you to go, Patty," she said anxiously. "I'll not enjoy the trip a bit if you're not along."

"I'll ask the first thing when I get home tonight," Patty promised. "How long do you plan to be gone?"

"We're spending at least two days. Folks say one can't get much of an idea of the celebration in one day. Mother wants to stay at the little Dutch Inn which is noted for its marvelous food."

"It will be exciting to remain overnight," Patty declared, her eyes dancing. "I think Mother should let me go."

The village of Pelma, a quaint Dutch community, was located some hundred miles from Dalton, but until the building of a paved road three years previously it had remained more or less isolated. The inhabitants tended to live entirely to themselves, but twice yearly, in spring when the tulips bloomed and again in the fall, a welcome sign was stretched across Main street and the hospitable Hollanders invited all to join in their celebrations.

Always Patty had wished to attend the festivities but for one reason or another she never had been able to make the trip.

"We plan to start directly after lunch," Gladys said as the girls parted company. "Telephone me early in the morning."

The hour was late. As she left the Harborg house Patty discovered her brother waiting in the car. He was dozing at the wheel but revived when the girls began to troop down the walk.

"It was nice of you to meet me, Jack," Patty told him gratefully, sliding into the seat beside him. "Or did Mother make you come?"

Her brother's response was a noncommittal grunt which Patty interpreted to mean that he had not come of his own free will. He seemed unimpressed as she displayed her prize and told him of the exciting way she had won it. Jack at sixteen liked to pretend that parties bored him; his sole interests were automobiles, football and mechanics.

"What did you do tonight, Jack?" Patty inquired absently.

"Nothing much. Spent a couple of hours at Hinkman's garage. I earned a dollar helping Hank fix up a car for two strangers."

"Strangers?" Patty asked with quick interest.

"Yes, two shady-looking characters. A main bearing had let go on their car and they seemed to think we ought to fix it in five minutes."

"Jack, can you describe those men?"

"Say, why are you so interested?" The boy gave his sister a sideways glance.

Patty found herself fairly trapped. While she intended to tell her parents about the two men she had seen in the glen, she knew better than to reveal her secret to Jack.

"Oh, I was just curious," she answered vaguely. "You said the men were shady looking characters."

"Well, maybe that was just my idea. They were well enough dressed, but they had an air I didn't like."

"Was one of the men tall and thin?"

"Oh, I didn't notice particularly," Jack replied impatiently. "I was too busy working."

"What state was the car from?" Patty knew that her brother seldom failed to observe the license plate of an out-of-town car.

"Illinois. But I can't see what difference it makes to you—"

"It doesn't," Patty returned quickly, "only I thought maybe the men were wanted by the police. Did you notice their luggage? They didn't have any suitcases—or boxes?"

"I tell you I was working, Pat. I didn't go prying around in the luggage compartment. I was a sap to say anything about them being questionable characters. They said they were salesmen and probably they were."

Patty offered no reply and the silence was not broken

until the car turned in at the driveway of the Saunders home.

Mr. and Mrs. Saunders were reading the evening paper in the living room. Patty immediately brought up the question of whether or not she might accompany Gladys Baker to Pelma the following day.

"Oh, dear me, I don't know what to say," said Mrs. Saunders looking questioningly toward her husband. "You'll be away several days?"

"Oh, you can't see the festival in less time, Mother. There is a different program each day with special Dutch folk dances and everything."

"Oh, let her go," said Mr. Saunders who disliked anything which remotely resembled an argument. "Mrs. Baker will see that she doesn't get into too much mischief."

"Oh, thanks, Dad!" Patty cried, giving him a hug.

Doors were locked for the night and everyone save Patty went to the kitchen for a refrigerator "snack." After disposing of half a lemon pie, a glass of milk and a generous helping of potato salad, Jack went upstairs to his room. His disappearance was the signal for Patty to reveal her exciting bit of news.

"Oh, Mother," she said urgently as her parents prepared to climb the stairs, "there's something I want to talk about with you."

"Won't tomorrow do just as well, dear? It's after midnight and we're all so tired."

Patty did not feel that she could keep her secret another minute.

"Gladys and I saw two strange men in the woods, tonight, Mother. They were burying a box but when they heard us, they ran to the road and drove away."

"Patty Rose, what are you saying?" Mrs. Saunders asked in amazement and with her husband she quickly came back down the stairway.

They asked many questions as the girl related her strange story, and when Patty told about the crackling twig and her fear of being discovered, Mrs. Saunders gave a little shudder.

"I wish I had never allowed you to attend the party, Patty Rose. Imagine Mrs. Harborg sending you into a dark wood where there were strange men—"

"Mrs. Harborg couldn't know about that, Mother. The shivered oak was right at the fringe of timber—"

"You were in grave danger and it frightens me to think of it."

"The strangers were more afraid of us than we were of them." Patty cast an appealing glance at her father for she did not like to be lectured.

"You did right to tell us this," said Mr. Saunders. "But if I were you I'd try to forget all about it and stay entirely away from Brighton's farm."

"What do you suppose those men were doing, Dad?"

"I have no idea, Patty. Burying a dead cat perhaps,

only I fear it was a more unwholesome business than that."

"Shouldn't we at least notify the police?"

"I'll report the matter tomorrow," her father promised, "but you may be sure those men are miles from here by this time. Run up to bed now, Patty, and try to get some sleep."

After Patty had gone to her bed she could hear her parents conversing in low tones from the living room but their words evidently were not intended for her ears. She felt a trifle disappointed because they had not made more of the affair, especially as she guessed that they were discussing it now they were alone.

Patty prepared for bed. As she hung up her garments, the booklet which she had found in the glen dropped from the pocket of her slacks.

She had forgotten to tell her parents of this interesting bit of evidence, but knowing that her father would wish to take it with him to the police station in the morning, she decided to examine the booklet carefully before relinquishing it. While the pages seemed to be blank, it was possible that a notation had been overlooked.

Snapping on the bed light, Patty snuggled down beneath the covers, and selecting the largest chocolate from the box on the night stand, fingered through the pages one by one.

CHAPTER III

AT THE DUTCH FESTIVAL

As PATTY turned a page of the booklet she came upon a leaf which was not blank. Three names, written in the same hand, a careless scrawl, stood out on the sheet.

Wm. Vandervort

J. R. Rainey

Elias Parkson.

Patty repeated the names to herself in a thoughtful whisper. They signified nothing to her. 'She knew none of the persons.

Quickly she thumbed through the remaining pages to learn if there were additional notations. On the next to last leaf she found a few numbers, as if the owner of the booklet had been trying to solve a problem in simple arithmetic. Otherwise the pages were blank.

Patty turned back to the three surnames, wondering if by chance they might identify either of the men she had seen in the forest. Her reflections were interrupted by a light tap on the door.

"Patty," said her mother, "it is after one o'clock."

"I'm just turning off the light now," Patty called,

and slipping the little booklet under her pillow, she drew up the covers and darkened the room.

In the morning she gave the "evidence" to her father and dismissed it from her thoughts, for immediately after breakfast, Gladys, who lived only a few doors away, came running over to learn if her friend could make the trip to Pelma.

"Wild horses couldn't keep me away," Patty told her gaily. "I'll pack my bag right now and be ready whenever you say."

"Mother thought it would be nice to take a picnic basket and eat supper somewhere along the road. That will bring us to Pelma early in the evening. I'd rather start right away, but Mother says we'll have enough time there if we leave after lunch."

The morning was consumed with elaborate preparations for the box supper. Mrs. Baker had sent instructions that Patty was to bring only her suitcase, but these orders were not taken seriously. Mrs. Saunders baked an Angel cake while Patty made several kinds of sandwiches.

At last the Baker car rolled up the driveway, and with a hasty kiss for her mother, Patty was ready to leave. Suitcase and picnic hamper were loaded into the rear luggage compartment, while Mrs. Baker protested that she did not know what in the world they would do with so much food.

"Gladys and I will attend to that for you," Patty promised.

Mrs. Baker assured Mrs. Saunders that she would take good care of Patty Rose, farewells were said, and then the automobile moved slowly away. In passing through the elm-shaded streets the girls craned their necks, now and then waving frantically as they attracted the attention of a friend. There was an annoying delay at the gasoline station, but finally the car swept past the familiar sign, "Dalton Welcomes You," and they were on their way to Pelma.

Mr. Baker was a cautious driver and his slow speed on the smooth highway did not satisfy Patty or Gladys. They were impatient to reach the little Dutch community, and while they knew it was not the plan to arrive at the village before nightfall, fretted at every delay. Toward five o'clock they began to think longingly of the food stored in the hampers and to watch eagerly for a suitable picnic site.

The afternoon sun was still high when Mr. Baker parked the car under a huge oak tree at the side of the highway. A shady hillside just beyond offered a desirable grounds, and the girls did not mind scrambling over the wire fence with the hampers and thermo jugs.

Six o'clock, with the sun dropping lower, brought the picnic to a hasty end. Papers were burned, all

scraps gathered up, and the empty baskets stored once more in the car.

"We're only twelve miles from Pelma," Mr. Baker announced as he read the speedometer. "We'll arrive there at just the right time."

"From the traffic on this road it looks as if nearly everyone in the state means to attend the festival," Mrs. Baker observed as a car whizzed past dangerously close.

A few miles farther on, the highway joined another paved road, and from that point Mr. Baker paid close attention to his driving for every few minutes a car sped by.

"I hope we'll have no trouble getting accommodations at the Inn," said Mrs. Baker anxiously. "I had no idea traffic would be so heavy."

"Oh, we'll have no trouble," Mr. Baker said confidently. "The people of Pelma anticipate a large crowd."

As the car approached the community, Mrs. Baker described her first visit there before paved roads had been built.

"It was years ago, and it took the entire day to make the trip. But it was well worth the trouble. It was springtime I remember and the tulips made the most gorgeous sight I have ever seen. There were long lanes of them on either side of the roadway and each house

in the village had its own colorful garden filled with daffodils, narcissus and of course, tulips."

"I'd love to attend the spring festival," Patty said wistfully, "but it will be interesting at this time of year too."

The pavement ended abruptly, and the car joined a lengthy procession of other automobiles over a narrow, dusty road which led into the village of Pelma. On either side of the highway were well tended vegetable gardens, acre upon acre of onions, cabbage and melons. Tall hollyhocks banked the walls of the plain clap-board houses. Few of the dwellings were painted although all were in a state of perfect repair. Here and there on the twisting street, a two-story brick house stood out in pretentious relief.

The main section of the village had been roped off so that cars could not enter, but as Mr. Baker turned aside to find the general parking ground, the girls caught a tantalizing glimpse of Hollanders in their native costumes.

"There's going to be a great deal to see," Patty declared with shining eyes.

The Pelma Inn was close by, and the girls did not mind carrying their light bags while Mr. Baker managed the heavy suitcase. From the outside the little hostelry was far from imposing, but Patty was delighted when she saw the interior. It was immacu-

lately clean despite the fact that many persons had tramped over the floors. The ceilings were high-beamed and a cheerful fire burned in the grate.

Mr. Baker set the bags by the door and went to talk with the inn keeper, but in a few minutes he came back. The girls knew at once that there were no accommodations available.

"Every room here is taken," he reported.

"I was afraid of this," murmured Mrs. Baker.
"Now what are we to do? We can't sleep in the car."

"The only thing we can do is to take rooms in a private home."

"But are there any?"

"Yes, the inn keeper gave me a list of names. We can leave our luggage here for the time being."

With a last look of regret at the attractive little lobby, the girls followed Mr. and Mrs. Baker from the inn.

Patty scarcely noticed which way the others were leading her, for she had eyes only for the unique sights of the street. Save that the picture was ruined by sightseers, she might have imagined herself transported to a bit of old Holland.

There were interesting little shops, their windows crowded with fascinating articles. From the bake shops came the delicious aroma of fresh bread; there were booths offering tulip bulbs, fall flowers and tempting baskets of vegetables. Through the square ran a

tiny canal spanned by an arching foot bridge. The water flowed steadily, pumped by a quaint Dutch mill.

As the girls walked slowly along they were met by many persons in costume, women wearing white lace caps, and fulls skirts, men in wide pantaloons and wooden shoes. The inhabitants of the little village nodded pleasantly to their visitors and a few spoke when Patty and Gladys responded to their smiles.

The girls found so much of interest that soon they lagged far behind Mr. and Mrs. Baker. Even though Gladys warned her that they must hasten on, Patty could not resist pausing to stare into a shop window where antique silver was attractively displayed.

"Oh, Gladys, just see this curious spoon," she cried.

Before her friend could turn to look into the window, both girls were startled by a sudden commotion in a dark street nearby.

"Help! Help!" called a shrill voice.

The girls whirled about and ran to the entrance of the narrow, cobble-stone lane. In the gathering darkness they saw two struggling figures. A girl who wore the costume of the village was clinging to the coat of a man in civilian dress, endeavoring to wrest some object from his hand. An old man huddled against a wall, watching the pair fearfully.

"Help! Help!" implored the girl again, and with one accord Patty and Gladys sped to her aid.

CHAPTER IV

GUESTS OF KATRINA

BEFORE Patty and Gladys could reach the struggling pair, the tall, thin man broke away from the girl who sought to hold him.

Encumbered by heavy wooden shoes and awkward skirts she could not take up the pursuit, but screamed lustily for Patty and Gladys to stop the culprit. They tried their best to grasp him as he darted swiftly past, and Patty did manage to clutch his coat.

The man whirled furiously about, striking at her face. Flinching from the blow she lost hold of the coat, but as the man wriggled free, a dark object fell from one of his pockets.

He reached to retrieve it, but as Patty tried to grasp him again, raced on down the street without the lost article. He turned at the corner and vanished in the direction of the crowded square.

Patty saw then that it was a billfold which had fallen to the sidewalk. As she picked it up, the girl in the Dutch costume and the old man who until now had crouched against the wall of the shop building, hurried toward her.

"That man was a pickpocket!" the girl said breathlessly. "He stole Mr. Wittenstine's pocketbook!"

"This isn't it?" Patty asked displaying the leather billfold.

"Ya, ya, das iss him!" the old man cried in delight, reaching out a gnarled hand to claim his property.

In halting English he explained that he had been buying fruit in a nearby shop which was crowded with strangers. He had felt someone press against him, and discovered belatedly that his pocketbook was missing. Recalling the tall, dark stranger with a moustache who had stood beside him, he rushed to the street in time to see the man disappearing. He shouted for him to stop, but instead the pickpocket had broken into a run.

"The man ran directly into me," the girl with blond braids said excitedly. "I managed to hold him until Mr. Wittenstine came up, but we were both getting the worst of it when you two arrived."

She thanked Patty and Gladys very prettily for their timely assistance, and then after Mr. Wittenstine, muttering excitedly to himself, had gone back to the fruit store, fell into step with them as they walked down the street.

"You must live here in Pelma," Patty remarked as she gazed rather curiously at the girl.

"Yes, our home isn't far from here."

"But you're not Dutch even if you do wear the costume."

"Oh, yes, I am," the girl contradicted with an amused laugh. "The Vandervorts are one of the oldest families in Pelma."

"The Vandervorts?" Patty echoed, startled by the name.

"Yes, my ancestor, Hans Vandervort came directly from Holland. He built the first brick house in Pelma. Of course my father was born in this state and so was I."

"You haven't told us your name," Gladys reminded her.

"My name? Oh, I'm Katrina Vandervort. Folks who come here to attend the festivals seem to think that the townspeople can't speak English and that they live on sauerkraut."

"Oh, I'm sure we never thought anything like that," Gladys murmured, a trifle shocked.

"Well, lots of folks do. The festival brings money into the town. That's why no one minds dressing in these cumbersome Dutch clothes and capering around for a few days."

"Do you take part in the dances on the square tomorrow?" Patty asked with interest.

"Oh, yes," Katrina sighed. "I'm in just about everything."

The girls had reached Main street. Katrina paused as if intending to say goodbye to her new acquaintances. Patty did not wish to part company with her until she had asked a few more questions, particularly

regarding the Vandervort name. As she was wondering how to broach such a personal subject, Katrina inquired carelessly:

"Where are you staying here in Pelma?"

"We're not staying anywhere it seems," Patty rejoined, welcoming any opportunity to prolong the conversation. "All the rooms at the Inn are taken."

"Most of the private homes are filled too," Katrina said.

"It begins to look as if we may have to drive back home or at least spend the night in some other town," Gladys remarked in disappointment.

"Oh, that would be a shame!" Katrina hesitated, and then said impulsively: "You must come to our house!"

"Are you keeping guests?" Patty inquired eagerly.

"Father told the committee, no, but this is different. You are my friends."

"It's very nice of you to invite us," said Gladys, "but we're not alone. My parents are searching for rooms too."

Katrina looked slightly troubled at this complication, but after a moment's thought assured the girls that she believed it would be possible for Mr. and Mrs. Baker to secure rooms next door to the Vandervort house at the Duveens.

"If they could that would end all of our troubles," Gladys declared. "I wonder what became of Mother and Dad?"

As she spoke, Mr. and Mrs. Baker were seen coming down the street, retracing their steps in search of the missing girls. Patty introduced Katrina, who repeated her offer of hospitality. The Bakers gratefully accepted but made it very clear that they would insist upon paying for the accommodations.

As Katrina led the way through the square and down a narrow, winding street, Gladys had an opportunity to whisper to Patty:

"Aren't we in luck? It will be lots more fun staying in a private home than at the Inn. And Katrina is a darling, isn't she?"

Patty nodded. "Yes, and it's odd that her name is Vandervort. I suppose it's a common enough one, but it gave me a start, because it's the same as the first of those three names in the little book!"

"Let's mention it to her."

"That's what I mean to do later. I'm only waiting for a good chance."

Presently Katrina stopped before a white clapboard house, which was distinguished from others on the street, chiefly because it had been recently painted. Mr. and Mrs. Baker rather feared that the Vandervorts might not feel as hospitably inclined as Katrina, but as they entered the spic and span interior, they were not left long in doubt.

"Mother!" called the daughter of the house. "We have guests. Where is father?"

Katrina's mother appeared from the blue and white tiled kitchen, her still luxuriant hair as white as the little flecks of flour on her apron. However, she was not in the least embarrassed, greeting Patty and her party with a grace and ease which bespoke age-mellowed refinement.

"Pelma is a small place," she said after Katrina had made the introductions. "But it is a very dear little place to all of us who live here. Every spot in the village is only an extension of our own front yard—there are many cherished memories associated with our little town. We live to help each other here, which is a unique thing in this modern world."

Mr. Vandervort appeared from the garden. He was a hale and hearty Hollander, still a powerful man physically in spite of his sixty-odd years of life. By the fond and trusting way he looked at his wife even a casual observer could see that theirs had been a union impervious to the ravages of time.

"Father is the originator of the Pelma tulip," Katrina announced mischievously. "I may as well tell you because he will if I don't."

"Now daughter," Mr. Vandervort responded with an indulgent smile. "I realize there are many more important things in the world than tulips. They just happen to be my hobby."

"Hobby!" Katrina laughed. "Passion, you mean." Upon learning that the visitors had been unable to

secure accommodations at Pelma, Mrs. Vandervort declared that they were more than welcome to share her humble home and board. However, as Katrina had hinted, only one bedroom was available, and this was assigned to Patty and Gladys after Mrs. Vandervort had arranged with her neighbor, Mrs. Duveen, to take in Mr. and Mrs. Baker.

"My little brother, Peter, will bring your luggage from the hotel," Katrina told the girls as she escorted them to their quarters. "He is helping this evening at the tulip booth, but I will send him as soon as he comes home."

Patty begged her to go to no trouble, but Katrina assured her that it would not inconvenience Peter to make the trip. She moved quietly about the tiny bedroom, opening windows and turning back the snowy-white covers of the high bed.

"You will sleep well tonight I think," she smiled. "That is, if you don't mind a feather tick."

"My grandmother had one and I loved it," Patty said, "but she never owned a beautiful carved bed like this."

"The property of my distinguished ancestor, Hans Vandervort," Katrina said, making a mock curtsey. "Nearly all of the really nice things in this house formerly belonged to him. Hans was an antique dealer in Europe—rather a famous one. But why am I boring

you with all this? You couldn't possibly be interested."

"Oh, but I am," Patty declared.

"If you like antiques I'll show you some of his things tomorrow," Katrina promised. "Right now I imagine you're anxious to get your bags. I'll see if I can't track down Peter."

"Oh, I wonder if I could ask you a personal question," Patty ventured as Katrina turned to leave.

"Certainly."

"Are there any other persons by the name of Vandervort living in Pelma?"

"No, we are the only family."

Patty could not hide her disappointment. "Then you couldn't possibly know a man by the name of William Vandervort," she said.

Katrina gave her a quick, penetrating glance. "I know him very well indeed," she replied. "He is my father."

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET SHELF

"YOUR father?" Patty echoed, startled by the unexpected answer to her question. "William Vander-vort?"

"Yes," Katrina responded, regarding the girls curiously. "Had you heard of him before coming to Pelma?"

Patty hesitated in her reply, not wishing to reveal the strange circumstance which had led to the discovery of the little booklet bearing the three surnames. To have seen Katrina's father was to know that the solidly built man could not have been either of the two persons observed in the woods.

"Father has a reputation as a grower of fine tulip bulbs," Katrina said. "Perhaps you heard of him in that connection."

"No, his name appeared in a little book which we picked up in the woods," Gladys revealed.

"Near here?" Katrina questioned in surprise. "I don't recall hearing Father say that he had lost anything."

"I doubt that this was his property," Patty said, and

explained that the article had been found near their own home at Dalton. She did not speak of the two men who had fled from the woods.

"I'm sure I can't understand how my father's name came to be in the book," Katrina remarked in a puzzled tone. "He has never been to Dalton."

"There were two other names," Patty recalled. "J. R. Rainey and Elias Parkson."

"I have never heard of either of them and I doubt that Father has. I will ask him if you wish."

"Oh, no, it isn't important," Patty replied carelessly. "Probably there are several persons by the same name."

"I don't know of another William Vandervort in the state," Katrina said with a shake of her long blond braids. "Father will be interested to hear about this."

With a smile of farewell she retreated from the bedroom, and the girls heard her wooden shoes clomping down the uncarpeted stairway.

Soon after Patty and Gladys had freshened themselves from their journey, they heard a polite little tap on door. This time it was Katrina's ten year old brother, Peter, who had brought the luggage. He was a sturdy, freckled lad with merry blue eyes which laughed back at Patty as she admired him in his picture-book costume.

Gladys tried to pay him for bringing the bags, but while the lad looked twice at the coin which she ex-

tended, he shook his head and bowed himself through the door.

Patty flung herself on the feather bed, testing its downy softness.

"Oh, Gladys, don't you love this place?" she sighed blissfully. "In a bed like this I could break Rip Van Winkle's record."

"The place has atmosphere too. Oh, we were lucky to get to stay here, for it's obvious that folks like the Vandervorts don't take in roomers. They're very likely the wealthiest folks in Pelma."

"I think you're wrong there, Gladys."

"Didn't you see the lovely things in the living room? Beautiful carved chairs, polished brass, a silver tea service—"

"All antiques left by Hans Vandervort, that's my guess. I couldn't help but notice a few things myself, Gladys. The curtains were of exquisite lace but they had been mended many times. The rugs were frayed. I suspect that the Vandervorts are feeling the pinch of poverty."

"Then we must be sure to pay them generously for the privilege of staying here," Gladys replied. "I'll warn Dad about it before he settles our bill."

The girls were tired and after unpacking their bags, abandoned themselves to the luxury of the feather bed. They slept soundly and did not awaken until morning

when they heard some member of the household moving quietly down the hall.

Patty yawned drowsily, and then sprang from bed to close the window. She stood there for a moment gazing down at the garden. The Vandervort yard was much larger than she had thought it to be the previous night, and stretched far back toward a deserted, tumble-down brick house.

"Come look at this old building, Gladys," she urged. "What do you suppose it can be?"

Her friend joined her at the window, but she did not share Patty's interest in the ruin.

"It's just an old abandoned dwelling," she responded, turning aside.

"The place looks as if it might be a hundred years old," Patty said musingly. "I wonder if it stands on the Vandervort property?"

"It's after eight o'clock!" Gladys interrupted her thoughts severely. "Unless you stop wondering so much we'll never get any breakfast."

Patty left the window and dressed so swiftly that she was ready long before Gladys had finished arranging her hair.

"Oh, coil it up any old way, and let's be off!" Patty advised teasingly. "Old slow poke!"

The girls descended to the living room, and finding it deserted for the moment, paused to admire a wall

shelf filled with blue delftware. However, it was the great fireplace with its picture tiles which captured Patty's interest. She was examining the copper kettles and brass fixtures when Katrina hurried in from the kitchen.

"Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes," she announced. "Did you sleep well?"

"Like a log," Gladys replied. "We don't wish to trouble your mother, Katrina. Can't we take breakfast at the Inn."

"Not this morning at least," Katrina answered firmly.

She conducted the girls to the dining room where the polished table was adorned with heavy silverware and gay flowers. Soon Mrs. Vandervort came in from the kitchen bearing a tray filled with crisp brown rusks and many covered dishes. Patty and Gladys had never tasted such delicious food.

From their chairs opposite the window, the girls obtained a clear view of the old dwelling which had drawn their attention from the bed chamber. Patty ventured to ask about it.

"Why, that is the old Hans Vandervort house," Katrina explained. "Our family never lived in it for Father built this place when he and Mother were married. At first the old brick house was rented, but in the last twenty years no one has lived there. It looks unsightly, doesn't it?"

"Not at all," Patty replied. "I like old houses."

"Peter and I used to enjoy playing there," Katrina added. "According to an old family legend a certain object was supposed to be hidden somewhere about the premises, and we amused ourselves by searching for it. Of course we never found anything."

Patty and Gladys gazed with new interest at the ruined dwelling.

"My husband wishes to tear the old place down but even if we could spare the money, I would not allow it," said Mrs. Vandervort. "Someday when we are more prosperous I hope to have it reconstructed and preserved as Hans Vandervort would desire."

"Do you mind if Gladys and I walk about the place after breakfast?" Patty inquired.

"Of course not," Katrina answered. "But the house is boarded up. I'd escort you personally only I'm supposed to take part in some folk dances at ten o'clock."

"We don't want to miss the program either," Gladys declared quickly. "We can let the house wait until some later time."

Mr. Vandervort and Peter long since had departed for the square, there to serve at the tulip booth. Breakfast over, Katrina glanced anxiously at the clock and hastily arose from the table.

"I must run upstairs and get into my *klompen* now or I'll be late."

"*Klompen?*" Gladys inquired.

"Wooden shoes," Katrina laughed. "Just try dancing in them sometime if you think it's easy!"

She darted upstairs, while Gladys and Patty, left to themselves, wandered out of doors and across the way to the Duveen house. Mr. and Mrs. Baker had gone to the Inn for breakfast, so the girls returned.

They entered the house quietly and it happened that Mrs. Vandervort and Katrina did not hear the door close. The mother and daughter were talking earnestly in the kitchen and their voices carried very clearly to Patty and Gladys.

"Katrina, your father doesn't wish you to enter this contest for Queen of the Festival. It is an honor to win, I know, but for a Vandervort it seems scarcely dignified."

"Mother, I am quite weary of trying to live up to dear old Hans," rejoined Katrina impatiently. "I don't like the idea of competing in the contest any better than does Father, but we may as well face facts. We need money desperately."

"Yes, Katrina."

"You don't wish to lose our property, Mother. If I should win the contest, I'd get a hundred and fifty dollars in cash, not to mention merchandise prizes—"

Her words died away, for Patty and Gladys, not wishing to listen to a conversation which was not intended for them, made a scraping sound with their shoes against the flagstone floor.

Mrs. Vandervort and Katrina emerged from the kitchen, their faces slightly flushed. They offered no apology or explanation.

Soon after Katrina had hastened away to the square, Mr. and Mrs. Baker called at the house for Patty and Gladys. The four wandered about town, enjoying the many unique sights.

Inquiring their way to the booth where Peter worked, the girls bought a large supply of choice Pelma bulbs. Until time for the dances to begin, they sauntered in and out of fascinating little shops.

"I wonder if our friend, the pickpocket, is still in town?" Patty remarked as they joined the dense throng congregated at the square. "This would be an excellent place for him to work."

The girls gripped their purses tightly, and for an enthralling hour watched the dances. To their prejudiced eye, Katrina was by far the most graceful performer, and the prettiest.

When the program finally ended, the girls tried to join their new friend, but the crowd milled about the platform and they were unable to reach her.

After lunching at the Inn with Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Patty and Gladys returned to the Vandervort home, intending to rest up after their strenuous morning. The outside door opening into the living room was ajar. Through the screen, Katrina was seen kneeling by the great fireplace. Her back was toward the girls and she

was so absorbed in her task that she heard nothing.

"What can she be doing, Patty?" Gladys whispered.

They saw Katrina reach far up into the soot-blackened chimney. There was a dull clatter, as of wood striking against stone. Then she stooped and picked up from the hearth a very curious object.

CHAPTER VI

THE WOODEN SHOE

UNAWARE that she was being observed, Katrina rocked back on her heels before the fire place, and as she turned slightly toward them, the girls saw that she held an old wooden shoe in her hand. From its interior she withdrew a roll of bills.

Patty and Gladys entered the house, slamming the screen door to warn of their approach. Startled by the sound, Katrina sprang to her feet and tried to return the shoe to its hiding place. Then aware that already she had been seen, she greeted the girls with an embarrassed laugh.

"I seem to be caught in the act! But I'm not robbing the family bank. I only meant to count the money."

"Is that wooden shoe your deposit box?" Patty inquired, curiously.

"Yes, it makes a handy receptacle. Father never trusts the banks."

"You mean you keep all of your money in the shoe?" Gladys asked in amazement. "Aren't you afraid to have so much cash in the house?"

"We've kept it here ever since I can remember. The shelf is well hidden."

"We learned of it just now," Patty said frankly.

"Oh, I have no fear that either of you will attempt to run off with the money," Katrina answered smiling broadly.

"Of course Gladys and I will never mention the hiding place, but others may learn your secret. The fireplace is plainly visible from the open doorway."

"The people of Pelma are honest."

"Yes, but the town is filled with strangers," Patty rejoined. "That pickpocket for instance."

"The festival soon will be over, and Mother seldom is away from the house."

Patty and Gladys could say no more, for if the Vandervorts were satisfied that their money was safe in the chimney, it was none of their concern.

"This old wooden shoe is one of our special family keepsakes," Katrina explained as she carefully tucked the roll of bills down deep into the curved toe.

"I have never seen another just like it," said Patty.

"I doubt that ever you will. It was made by Hans Vandervort after he came to this country. He spent many weeks upon the carving and took infinite pains."

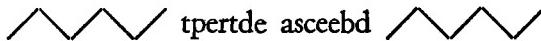
"What became of the mate to this shoe?" Patty asked curiously. "Or did Hans make only the one?"

"I imagine there must have been two shoes originally, but I'm not certain," Katrina answered thought-

fully. "After Hans died only one was found. The mystery surrounding this shoe has never been cleared up."

"Mystery?" Patty inquired alertly.

Katrina turned the shoe over in her hand, exposing a curious set of letters and markings which had been carved on the wooden sole.



"Did you ever see anything like it before?" Katrina asked.

Patty and Gladys both shook their heads.

"I'll tell you my theory," Katrina declared eagerly. "We know that this shoe was made by Hans Vandervort after his arrival in this country, so it's fairly obvious that the markings were his. I suspect they comprise a secret code."

"A code?" Gladys echoed.

"Oh, that's only my own idea, but I have substantial evidence to support such a theory. I don't know if I told you or not, but Hans Vandervort had a brother named Carl. Both are dead now, but late in the nineteenth century they were well known in Europe as antique dealers."

"You mentioned only Hans, I believe," said Patty.

"Hans and Carl had a thriving partnership and their establishment was patronized by royalty. They acquired a generous-sized fortune. Then came Euro-

pian wars and one reverse after another. The brothers were accused of political intrigue, all of the Vandervort land was confiscated, and finally Carl and Hans with their families fled to this country, bringing with them some of their more valuable antiques and art treasures."

"You mentioned that Hans Vandervort settled here in Pelma," Patty prompted as Katrina paused in her narrative.

"Yes, both Hans and Carl came to this state, but as soon as affairs cleared up in Europe, Carl returned there, hoping to salvage something from the wreckage of his business. You see, the brothers found themselves in a peculiar position. Although they were in possession of many fine antiques, at that time few persons in this country were sufficiently interested in art treasures to pay a fair price for them."

"Europe offered a better market?" Patty inquired.

"In those days, yes. Now it is quite the other way. At any rate, Carl returned to Holland and was fairly successful in disposing of some of the finer objects in the Vandervort collection. The brothers kept in close touch with each other, using a code known only to themselves. Their business was of such a nature that many of the important transactions had to be kept secret."

"How does this wooden shoe enter into the affairs of the brothers?" Patty questioned. "What makes you

think these symbols have any connection with the code?"

"Well, that is the story which was handed down from one generation to another. Hans left a number of letters which seemed to suggest that the shoe had an important significance to the two brothers. Unfortunately, nearly all of the family papers were lost many years ago."

"What meaning does the queer chicken-track marking have?" Gladys questioned, picking up the shoe to look at it more closely.

"That is part of the mystery—no one has ever been able to puzzle it out."

"Hans did not leave a key to the code?" Patty asked in surprise.

"Only Carl possessed it. Hans died after an illness of only a day. Just before the end he tried to reveal something about the wooden shoe but he lacked strength to express his thought."

"It seems queer that in all these years no one has been able to puzzle out the code," Patty commented thoughtfully.

"At one time or another I think every member of the family has tried. There is another interesting fact in connection with the wooden shoe."

"And what is that?" Gladys asked.

"According to the family legend, it was believed that Hans secreted many valuable treasures in the house."

"Not that old house which we were asking about this morning?" Patty questioned.

"Yes, after Hans Vandervort died many objects were found, but the most valuable possession of all could never be located. The famous Beauvis tapestries simply disappeared. They were worth a large sum even in those days, and now would be almost without price. It was known that Hans and Carl brought the tapestries to this country, and they were never sold. In fact, immediately after Hans' death, Carl wrote asking about them.

"The house was searched from roof to cellar, but the tapestries could not be located. Then Carl wrote again, requesting that the wooden shoe be sent to him."

"He knew about the strange markings?" Patty inquired quickly.

"Apparently he did, and he seemed to be afraid to reveal the code lest someone else recover the tapestries. At least that's the way I puzzled it out. I think he planned to come here and find them himself."

"What happened to prevent him?" Gladys questioned.

"He died quite suddenly—even before the wooden shoe could be sent abroad. After that the mystery became even more hopeless, because Carl never had revealed his business secrets to any member of his family."

With both brothers gone, no one had the key to the code."

"Yet it was thought that the tapestries had been hidden in the old brick house?" Patty asked musingly.

"That was the theory, but the house was thoroughly ransacked. It's my own opinion that the tapestries were secreted elsewhere, but no one will ever find the place."

"Perhaps someday they'll come to light," Patty said.

Katrina shook her head. "I don't believe in miracles. And it surely would be one if those tapestries were found after all these years. Why, it would make us well-to-do again, perhaps rich!"

"What would you do if you should find them?"
Patty asked with a warm smile.

"What wouldn't I do?" Katrina locked her arms about her knees as she gazed dreamily off into space. "First I'd rebuild the old brick house just to show my gratitude to Hans Vandervort. Next I'd give Father enough money so that he would never need to worry again, and he could launch into the tulip raising business in a really big way. I'd buy Mother new clothes and send Peter away to a private school."

"Nothing for yourself?" Patty asked.

"Oh, the thrill of finding those lovely old French tapestries would be enough for me. But then, I can afford to be generous, knowing that it will never cost

me anything. Father thinks Hans disposed of the tapestries long before his death. Who knows? It's just one of those unsolvable riddles."

"I can understand why the old wooden shoe is a treasured keepsake," Patty said quietly. "I'd feel very proud to be its owner."

Katrina replaced the shoe on the high shelf in the chimney.

"This hiding place was Father's handiwork," Katrina explained. "In fact, ingenuity runs in our family, commencing with Hans. I daresay if the tapestries ever are found it will be in an amazing place."

She led Patty and Gladys over the lower floor, indicating many choice articles which had been the property of the famous collector. There were two magnificent sixteenth century plates, paintings by Flemish masters, and an elaborate Louis XV commode which had two secret compartments.

"The drawers were empty when the commode came into our possession," Katrina explained. "Oh, yes, upstairs in your bedroom you'll find a piece of furniture which has another inner hiding place."

"Really?" Gladys asked, all interest. "Not the desk?"

"I'll let you search for it yourselves," Katrina replied mischievously. "But before you go upstairs let me show you something else."

She opened the lower drawer of the commode,

carefully removing a garment which had been wrapped in tissue paper. Patty and Gladys saw that it was a beautiful Dutch costume, complete with apron, embroidered bodice and winged-lace cap.

"This dress belonged to my grandmother," Katrina said as she held it up for the girls to admire. "Even in Holland you cannot buy handiwork such as this. I shall wear the costume tomorrow when I compete for the Queen of the Festival prize."

"Then you have definitely decided to enter?" Gladys inquired before she stopped to consider that the question might prove an embarrassing one.

"Yes," Katrina answered gravely. "We need the prize money. I am afraid that my ambitions exceed my qualification for the part, but one may always try."

"This dress should help you win," Patty declared, fingering a soft fold of the garment. "It is beautiful, Katrina."

"When I have pressed the costume it will look much nicer. I must heat my iron now if I may be excused."

"We'll run upstairs and see if we can ferret out that piece of furniture with the hidden compartment," Patty said, as she and Gladys turned toward the stairway. "If you hear us tearing down the place, don't be alarmed."

The girls spent an hour exploring every nook and cranny of their room; they pounded and thumped the desk; carefully they examined the carved bed. At

length, Gladys threw herself down in a chair, thoroughly disgusted by their failure.

"A fine pair of detectives we'd make, Patty Rose! We can't locate that hiding place even after we were told where to search."

"Katrīna will reveal the secret tomorrow. The thing I'm interested in is that old wooden shoe with the queer imprint. Wouldn't it be exciting to solve the code?"

"We're so good at that sort of thing," Gladys replied scoffingly. "If we can't find a simple old secret compartment, a fine chance we'd have of locating the priceless Beauvis tapestries!"

"I was only talking. I'm not conceited enough to think we could succeed where others have failed, but it's fun to speculate about it anyway."

"Just what is a Beauvis tapestry, Patty? I didn't dare ask Katrina for fear of exposing my ignorance."

"I don't know much about such things myself," Patty admitted. "Of course they were beautiful wall coverings used in palaces and such places. Gothic tapestries date from the fifteenth century, and next to them I think the Beauvis group are the most important. Those with white backgrounds are considered particularly choice for some reason. Many of the Beauvis tapestries were made of fine silk so that they are not as heavy and cumbersome as other hangings."

"I don't see how as large an article as that could be hidden in a house and never discovered," Gladys remarked meditatively. "It doesn't sound logical to me."

"Katrina said herself that she thought the tapestries had been secreted elsewhere."

"It would be my guess that Mr. Vandervort comes closer to the truth. Probably if the tapestries ever existed they were sold before Hans Vandervort's death."

Patty did not take issue with the opinion nor offer one of her own. Instead she suggested that since it was not yet time to dress for dinner, they might walk down to the old brick house.

They left by a rear door, and after pausing in the garden to admire the flower beds, continued down the path toward the vacant Vandervort dwelling. The chimney had fallen down, and the place was in a general state of disrepair, but the walls and foundation still looked remarkably firm for such an old house. Doors and windows were boarded up so that it was impossible to gain any idea of the inside.

"There's nothing here to see," Gladys declared in disappointment. "Its history is the best part of this place."

"I wish Katrina would take us through the house before we leave," Patty remarked as she reluctantly followed her friend back to the garden.

That evening after dinner, the girls teased Katrina to show them the secret hiding place in their bedroom. Laughing at their eagerness, she led them to the old carved bed.

"Oh, we searched there," Gladys said in chagrin.

"I'm afraid you didn't look in the right place then. Help me hold up this corner of the bed and I'll show you."

As the girls obeyed, Katrina amazed them by twisting one of the round legs. It came off in her hand, disclosing a long hollow cavity running far up into the post of the bed.

"Well, that is clever!" Gladys admitted. "We never thought of tearing the bed down."

"The cavity was empty when it came into our possession," Katrina told them. "Hans Vandervort bequeathed us many hiding places, but like old Mother Hubbard's cupboard they were all quite bare."

Later in the evening as Patty and Gladys were retiring, Katrina came again to their room, this time dressed in the Dutch costume which she intended to wear the following morning. The dress was a perfect fit for her slender figure, and she made a pretty picture as she whirled about in the full skirt.

"If there is any justice in Pelma, you'll be named Queen tomorrow," Patty declared. "We'll be wishing hard for you."

The girls slept late the next morning and by the

time they came downstairs, Katrina already had gone. Joining Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Patty and Gladys hastened to the square to witness the awarding of prizes and the selection of the Festival Queen.

The crowd was even more dense than upon the previous day. Arriving late, the girls found it almost impossible to push near enough to the front to gain an unobstructed view of the stage where Pelma's most attractive misses were on parade.

"Can you see Katrina?" Gladys asked as she stood a-tiptoe.

"No, only a lot of blue skirts swishing past," Patty whispered. "That big fat man in front blocks everything."

The girls shifted to a new location, but they could see very little better.

"Well, at least we'll be able to hear when the contest winner is announced," Gladys remarked.

But the girls were destined not to hear either, for as the judge mounted the platform to announce the name of the one who had been chosen Festival Queen, Patty Rose suddenly gripped her companion's hand. Her eyes were upon a tall, dark man some distance to the right.

"It's that same pickpocket who tried to rob old Mr. Wittenstine!" she exclaimed. "Let's try to catch him!"

CHAPTER VII

THE FESTIVAL QUEEN

PATTY and Gladys pushed their way through the throng, but before they could reach the man, he melted away in the crowd. They were more than ever certain that he was the same person who had taken Mr. Wittenstine's billfold and they suspected that he had fled upon recognizing them.

"Well, we let him get away again," Patty said in disappointment.

Just then the crowd began to clap and cheer. The Festival Queen had been chosen by the judges.

"Oh, dear, we're missing everything," Gladys murmured, turning toward the platform again. Unintentionally, she trod on the white shoes of a woman who stood beside her, and received only a cold stare in return for her apology.

"Was Katrina chosen?" Patty asked eagerly.

"I can't see a thing," Gladys complained. "Oh, this is maddening!"

The girls wriggled through the crowd, determined to get closer to the stage. Finally they found a small

gap in the sea of bodies, and were able to squeeze into it.

"Oh, there she is!" Patty Rose cried so excitedly that others turned to gaze in her direction. "Katrina has won, Gladys! She's been named Queen of the Festival!"

The girls had gained their point of vantage too late to see any of the ceremony in connection with the selection of the Queen and her maids of honor. As Katrina was leaving the stage, she observed her friends in the audience, and sent them a warm smile.

"Oh, I'm so glad," Patty said happily. "It will be a nice honor, and besides, the money will mean a great deal to the family."

With the morning program ended, the crowd began to disperse. While Patty and Gladys were looking about for Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Katrina came hurrying up, her eyes dancing with excitement.

"I won!" she proclaimed jubilantly, waving a sealed envelope under their eyes. "A hundred and fifty dollars! Pinch me so I'll know I'm not dreaming!"

Patty and Gladys congratulated Katrina warmly, telling her again how attractive she appeared in her costume.

"I can't believe it yet!" Katrina laughed gaily. "I was almost certain that Julia Duveen would be crowned Queen—she is such a beautiful girl."

"If I were you, I'd be careful with that money,"

Patty warned in an undertone. "You may never get home with it."

"Oh, yes I will! I'm going straight there now and put it in the old wooden shoe. Wait until Mother hears! She'll forgive me for entering the contest."

Patty and Gladys glanced anxiously about for it seemed to them that Katrina, in her state of excitement, spoke indiscreetly and in far too loud a tone. A number of strangers stood close by and several appeared to be listening to the conversation.

"Do put that money away before you lose it," Gladys urged nervously.

Katrina obediently thrust the envelope into the bodice of her dress.

"I'll relieve you of all anxiety by taking it straight home now," she declared, and with a warm handclasp for each of the girls, vanished into the crowd.

"I'll be glad if she arrives without being robbed," Patty said with misgiving. "Katrina is a grand little person, but I certainly don't approve of her banking methods."

The girls looked about once more for Mr. and Mrs. Baker.

"They probably have gone to the Inn for luncheon," Gladys remarked. "We may as well walk over there."

The little hotel lobby was thronged with visitors so that it was not easy to find a place to sit. Mr. and Mrs. Baker had not arrived, and presently, Patty grew a bit restless.

"I believe I'll go up to the desk and look at the register, Gladys. I'd like to find out if anyone from Dalton is here for the festival. Want to come along?"

"No, I'll stay here and hold our chairs."

The genial inn keeper was very willing to show Patty Rose the hotel register. She ran her eye rapidly down the list of guests, noting the names of all new arrivals. Only one woman from Dalton had taken rooms at the Inn and Patty did not know her well.

Then the girl turned a page, and a name fairly leaped before her startled eyes.

"Carl Vandervort—New York City."

"Why, how very strange," thought Patty, unable to remove her gaze from the fascinating scrawl. "I wonder if this man could be a relative of Katrina's? She didn't mention that he was coming to Pelma."

Patty motioned to Gladys, who quickly abandoned the two chairs by the window. She too was deeply interested in the name.

"Carl Vandervort," she repeated slowly. "Why, that was the name of one of the famous brothers!"

"Yes, but of course it couldn't be the same person. Hans and Carl both died many years ago. This man might be a relative though. I wonder if Katrina knows he is in town?"

When the inn keeper had a minute to himself, the girls drew his attention to the name in the register.

"Why, yes, Mr. Vandervort came in this morning. I should have turned him away, but it happened that

another party was just leaving, so I let him have the room. Even at that he was dissatisfied."

"We are staying at the William Vandervort home," Patty explained. "That's how we chanced to notice the name."

"The young man was inquiring about the Vandervort family only a few minutes ago."

"Then he must be a relative," Patty said quickly.

"I asked him that same question," the inn keeper replied with a shrug. "He the same as told me it was none of my affair."

"Mr. Vandervort isn't in the lobby now?" Patty inquired.

"No, he deposited his key at the desk a few minutes ago and left."

There was nothing more to be learned, and since at this moment Mr. and Mrs. Baker wandered into the hotel, the girls hastened to join them. They all went together to the dining room.

"Your father and I were just remarking that we must be returning to Dalton soon," Mrs. Baker said to her daughter as they awaited dessert. "We might start back immediately after breakfast tomorrow."

"Oh, Mother!" Gladys protested. "Not tomorrow! We're having such a grand time and there's still so much to see. Please can't we stay at least another day?"

Patty Rose could not enter the discussion since she

was a guest, but her eyes made an eloquent appeal. She loved the quaint little village, and especially disliked the thought of leaving it just as she was becoming well acquainted with Katrina.

"We'll see," Mrs. Baker promised as her daughter continued to tease. "If Patty doesn't feel that she is compelled to return early, perhaps we could stretch our visit a bit."

"Oh, Mother won't mind if I'm gone a week," Patty answered confidently.

After luncheon, Mr. and Mrs. Baker went down the street to make a few purchases. Left to themselves again, the girls idled about the village for a time, watching a pretty drill which was being given by school children in the square. They paused at a sidewalk cafe for a cool drink of buttermilk, and then, eager to learn if Katrina knew of the visitor who had arrived in Pelma, returned to the Vandervort home.

The late crowned Queen of the Festival was there ahead of them, and when the girls entered the front door they heard Katrina and her parents talking together excitedly.

"But Father," the young girl was protesting, "why should you object to my entering the contest? I competed against some of my very best friends and they didn't seem to think anything about it. And besides, you know that we have urgent need for the money I won."

"What you say is true, daughter, as far as the money goes," William Vandervort replied. "But anything of this kind is against the family tradition—no Vandervort should ever make a public exhibition of himself."

"Now William!" Katrina's mother said, enlisting in her daughter's cause. "You are too unbending in these matters. It was only a contest for the young folks, and as for me, I can't help feeling proud of our daughter."

"And we're proud too!" Gladys exclaimed as she and Patty entered the room. "Congratulations again, Katrina."

With four women thus arrayed against him, William Vandervort beat a strategic retreat, retiring to his beloved garden, safe from the pressure of superior feminine forces.

"Don't you mind him," Mrs. Vandervort said by way of an apology. "He is really proud of Katrina, but he would never admit it at the expense of what he thinks is the honor of the family."

"Oh, well," laughed Katrina, as she pulled the envelope containing the prize money from her dress, "here's the ill-gotten gain. I think I'll put it in the wooden shoe right now before anything happens to it."

She tripped over to the fire place and removed the shoe from its hiding place on the shelf. Carefully she inserted the envelope far down in the toe. She was in the act of replacing the shoe when the door bell rang.

Katrina set the wooden shoe on the fireplace floor.

"Oh, that's Father! He's locked himself out of the house again."

She abandoned her treasure for a moment to accommodate her father. It was not Mr. Vandervort but a stranger who stood at the door. He was a tall young man, light of hair with pale blue eyes which regarded Katrina with cold appraisal.

"Is this the home of William Vandervort?" the man inquired.

"Yes, sir," Katrina replied in confusion. "I hope we may be of some service to you."

"Perhaps you can," he replied stiffly. "I am Carl Vandervort, of New York, late of Amsterdam, Holland. I have been informed that the descendants of certain members of my family may have settled in this village."

Upon hearing that the stranger bore the Vandervort name, Katrina and her mother proceeded to make him welcome in their home. They called Mr. Vandervort from the garden, but when he appeared in his work-a-day clothes, the younger man seemed to regard him with an ill-concealed disdain.

Patty and Gladys felt that they were now intruding in what was properly a purely private affair and excused themselves.

"Oh, don't leave," Katrina pleaded, and her tone conveyed that she really wished them to remain.

"If you care to tell me," William Vandervort said to the visitor with civil dignity, "I should be interested

to learn from which branch of the family you descend."

"I take my name from my great grandfather, Carl Vandervort, a noted old world art dealer," the young man answered as his eyes roved swiftly about the room. "His brother, Hans Vandervort migrated to this country, and it is in him that I am particularly interested."

"We are direct descendants of Hans Vandervort and can tell you about him," Katrina said eagerly. "His old house stands yonder. You can see it from the dining room window."

"Indeed?" asked the visitor. He arose and moved toward the adjoining room, followed by Mrs. Vandervort. While the two talked about the old house, Katrina, noting that their backs were turned, seized the opportunity to replace the wooden shoe in the chimney.

When Carl Vandervort returned to his chair in the living room, the girls were startled to see his eyes rove directly to the fireplace. It did not seem possible that he could have observed Katrina's act, yet his next words threw a chill upon the little group.

"Oh, by the way," he said in a tone which was disarmingly casual. "In our family there is an odd story regarding a wooden shoe owned by Hans Vandervort. I notice that you have cherished many of the old possessions. I don't suppose you ever heard what became of that particular keepsake?"

CHAPTER VIII

KATRINA'S LOSS

A SILENCE fell upon the room. Katrina's blue eyes met those of her mother, but the latter chose to ignore their message of warning.

"Why, yes, we know what became of the old wooden shoe," she said evenly. "It is now in our possession and has been since the death of my husband's father."

"I have always had a great curiosity to see it," Carl Vandervort declared. "According to the story handed down by our family, the shoe bore certain curious markings."

"And is that why you came to Pelma?" Katrina asked with an abruptness which approached hostility. "You are trying to trace the Beauvis tapestries?"

"Katrinal!" reproved her mother sternly.

"No," the visitor answerd, ignoring the girl completely and directing his conversation to Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort. "I came here solely because I wished to learn if any descendants of Hans Vandervort were still alive. But your daughter's remark interests me for I have never heard of the Beauvis tapestries. Are they in any way connected with the wooden shoe?"

Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort related the tale, while Katrina, suspicious and subdued, sat silent on the footstool by the hearth. Once she glanced at Patty Rose as if to say: "I do not trust this man," and strangely, the girls could understand her feeling. From the first they sensed a certain unpleasant quality about Carl Vandervort, and now as the man listened with a show of deep interest to the words of Katrina's mother, it occurred to them that he might be pretending ignorance regarding the Beauvis tapestries solely to learn how much the Vandervorts knew.

"If it is convenient I should very much like to see the old wooden shoe," the visitor remarked.

At this request both Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort grew embarrassed, for they did not wish to reveal that the wooden shoe served as a hiding place for the family wealth.

"Why, yes, we shall certainly show it to you before you leave," Mrs. Vandervort said quickly. "You will remain with us for several days of course."

"That is very kind of you," Carl said in his formal way. "But my luggage is now at the Inn. It seems to be a well-kept little place. I fancy that I should be very comfortable there."

Patty Rose imagined that the elder Vandervorts would be rebuffed by this oblique refusal; but she did not understand the sturdy quality of their hospitality

which made it a duty to provide bed and board for the most distant kinsman.

"Our little home is even more modest than the inn," William Vandervort responded. "But such as we have, we give freely. You are very welcome here, I assure you, and perhaps what we lack in luxury we may make up in homely comfort."

"Our son, Peter, would be very glad to help transfer your luggage from the inn," Mrs. Vandervort added.

The stranger at first seemed to be slightly annoyed at their generosity; then Patty Rose noted that the aloof look vanished and an expression of cunning calculation came into his eyes for an instant. His attitude abruptly changed and he became very affable.

"You do me the greatest honor," he said with a polished old-world bow. "I shall be very glad to accept your kind offer and I am sure that my stay in your wholesome little home will be a rare pleasure."

That settled, the next task was to find Peter who like all small boys never kept to any very definite headquarters. Upon her mother's orders, Katrina went out to find him and soon returned with the lad whose clothing was still dusty from a recent slide into second-base.

"This is my son, Peter, Mr. Vandervort," said Katrina's mother. "He will assist you in bringing your luggage from the inn."

Peter was not sure that he had heard his mother rightly.

"Did you say Mr. Vandervort?" he asked. "Why that's our name."

"The gentleman is a relative of your father," Mrs. Vandervort explained.

"Oh," the boy said involuntarily, as if the information had been disappointing.

After Peter and the stranger had departed for the inn, Patty Rose and Gladys excused themselves and retired to their room. They could hear Katrina and her mother moving about in an adjoining bedchamber as they prepared it for the guest. The two were conversing, and now and then Katrina's words reached their ears.

"I do not trust this man, Mother!" the girl said vehemently. "We were not wise in asking him to our house."

"Nonsense, daughter! You should not even think such thoughts."

"His interest in the wooden shoe and the Beauvis tapestries—is it not peculiar?"

"It is only natural that a member of the family should ask such questions, Katrina. He did not speak of the tapestries until I told the story regarding them."

"He only pretended to have no knowledge, Mother. For aught we know, the man may not even be a Vandervort."

"Katrina, you are becoming very fanciful in distrusting our kinsman. He is the picture of your great uncle. He has the same high forehead and thin nose."

"Well, perhaps he is a Vandervort," Katrina admitted grudgingly, "but I am assured he came here for no good purpose. Perhaps he hopes to find the tapestries."

"I only wish he could, Katrina. If Carl Vandervort accomplishes such a mission, succeeding where all others have failed, our debt to him would be great. We could well afford to divide our riches with him. But such a thought is ridiculous, daughter. The Beauvis tapestries are gone for all time. Let us talk no more of this."

The cleaning work went on. Presently, after Katrina and her mother had gone downstairs, Patty and Gladys heard a murmur of voices in the lower floor which told them that the guest had returned with little Peter. Fragrant cooking odors began to float up from the kitchen.

Patty idly turned the pages of a magazine, vainly seeking a story which looked interesting. At last she tossed the periodical aside.

"I think I'll go downstairs for a little while. Want to come along, Gladys?"

"No, thanks, I don't feel like listening to ancestor talk. I'd rather just stay here and rest."

Patty heard no murmur of voices as she slowly descended the stairs. The lower floor seemed to be

entirely deserted save for the kitchen where the occasional rattle of a pan proclaimed that Katrina and her mother were still busy. Patty assumed that Carl Vandervort had gone somewhere with the master of the house, and so, upon reaching the first landing, was surprised to see the guest standing alone in the living room.

As she leaned over the railing, she saw him glance in the direction of the kitchen. Then he walked swiftly to the fireplace, and crouching down, gazed far up into the smoke chamber.

Patty moved slightly and a step creaked beneath her weight. Carl Vandervort straightened and whirled quickly about, a flush spreading over his pallid cheeks.

"I was admiring this fine old fire shovel," he said nervously as Patty came on down the stairway. "My grandfather had one very much like it."

"Indeed?" asked Patty. She did not believe that he had been looking at the object.

She deliberately lingered in the living room, and the guest after a desultory attempt at casual conversation, took his hat and said he thought he would go for a walk in the garden.

However, it was not the well-tended flower beds which captured Carl Vandervort's interest. From the dining room window, Patty saw him walk past them with scarcely a second glance.

"He's going straight to the old Hans Vandervort

house!" she observed. "I'm beginning to think as Katrina does that he may have come here for a definite purpose."

For some time she stood at the window watching the stranger. He walked around the house several times, studying it appraisingly. After testing the doors and finding them locked, he sat down under a shady elm tree where he seemed to lose himself in deep thought.

Patty wandered out into the garden, but the guest gave no indication that he saw her. He appeared to prefer his own company. Presently Katrina joined her, and together they picked a huge bouquet of flowers for the table.

Both girls were more quiet than usual. Katrina seemed deeply depressed, while Patty Rose was troubled because of the little scene she had witnessed in the living room. She wished to warn her friend that the money secreted in the wooden shoe might not be safe, yet the matter was a delicate one to broach. She could not accuse Carl Vandervort of dishonesty.

As if fearing that Patty Rose might expose his recent act, the guest left his place under the tree and joined the girls. He remained close by Katrina's side, carrying her basket of flowers when she returned to the house. Patty had no opportunity even to mention the wooden shoe to her friend.

Mrs. Vandervort had set the table for seven persons,

but Patty and Gladys, feeling that the dinner should be a purely family one, politely offered an excuse for not staying. They dined with Mr. and Mrs. Baker at the inn, and after attending the early evening program at the square, retired to their room.

Shortly after ten o'clock, the girls heard Carl Vandervort enter his chamber, another door slammed farther along the hall, and then the house settled down for the night. Patty Rose slept heavily, awakening only once when she heard Gladys murmur irritably:

"What possesses that man anyway? He must have the insomnia."

"What man?" Patty mumbled drowsily.

"Carl Vandervort of course. He's been pacing up and down in his room half the night. Why doesn't he go to bed?"

Patty listened for a moment to the steady tramp, tramp, tramp, which could be heard through the thin partition, but in her sleep-drugged state, the sound was not annoying. She promptly went off to sleep again.

Eight o'clock found the girls dressed and ready for breakfast, although Gladys was a trifle cross because her night's rest had been disturbed.

"I believe you could sleep through anything, Patty Rose," she declared. "That tramping went on until after two o'clock. I guess Carl Vandervort's conscience must have been troubling him."

As the girls closed their door behind them, the guest

under discussion emerged from his own bedroom. He nodded so coldly that Patty wondered if he could have heard Gladys' remark through the thin partition.

The man went on downstairs ahead of the girls, stepping into the dining room to speak with Mrs. Vandervort who was ready to announce breakfast.

"Thank you, but I shall not remain for it," he told her. "I find it necessary to send a telegram to New York without delay. I shall take my breakfast at the Inn."

Mrs. Vandervort looked rebuked, and moved aside to allow him to pass. Just at that moment, Katrina, laboring under great excitement, came hurrying from the living room.

"Oh, Mother, a dreadful thing has happened!" she exclaimed, trying to control her voice. "The wooden shoe is gone. Someone has taken it from the shelf on the chimney!"

"What are you saying, Katrina?"

"Just now I reached my hand up on the shelf to make certain the shoe was still there. It is gone, Mother. Someone has stolen our money!"

Katrina's voice broke, and she talked excitedly as she led the little group into the living room.

"I am sure you are wrong, daughter," Mrs. Vandervort said calmly. "Once before you were certain the shoe had been taken but it was only pushed far back on the shelf. Let me look."

While Mrs. Vandervort ran her hand far up the chimney, the stranger stood watching with an expression which was difficult to interpret. Katrina bestowed upon him a quick, suspicious glance which was not lost upon Patty and Gladys.

"You are right, Katrina!" Mrs. Vandervort exclaimed, and for the first time she lost her poise. "The shoe is not here. But I cannot believe that it has been stolen. Your father must have removed it to a safer place."

"I can't imagine anyone keeping money in an old wooden shoe," Carl Vandervort said with an amused smile. "What a quaint idea."

"It isn't so funny when you've lost every penny of your savings!" Katrina cried feelingly. "All my prize money too. And we needed it so desperately."

"Now, now, don't become excited," Mrs. Vandervort said hastily. "I feel certain William has removed the shoe to another hiding place."

While Patty and Gladys were trying to console Katrina, she went to the stairway and called her husband. He came at once, but was as startled over the loss as were Katrina and her mother.

"I cannot understand this," he murmured. "All our savings gone? Such a blow could not fall upon us —Peter must know something about the matter."

The lad was called but he immediately denied that he had touched either the money or the shoe.

"Did you tell anyone about the hiding place?" William Vandervort asked sternly. "Think, Peter, and do not fear that I shall punish you."

The lad hesitated and then answered reluctantly: "I once spoke of it to my playmate, Cris—and last night to our guest."

"As we walked to the Inn, Peter did mention that the wooden shoe was hidden in the chimney," Carl Vandervort said evenly. "I fear he has told half the town."

"I haven't!" Peter cried angrily. "And you asked me questions."

"I don't recall that I did," the man replied curtly, no longer trying to conceal his irritation. "However, it is of no great importance either way. I know nothing of the matter."

He turned as if to leave the house.

"Where are you going, Mr. Vandervort?" Katrina asked and her voice was sharp.

"I have a telegram to send. After that I shall return here for my bags. In view of your attitude, I could not remain longer in this house."

"Katrina meant no offense," said Mrs. Vandervort in distress. "You are welcome here, I assure you. My husband and I do not blame you in any way for our great loss."

"Katrina and my son have been very rude," added her husband. "I beg of you to accept their apologies."

The guest turned toward Katrina with a cold smile, waiting for her to speak. But the self-satisfied smirk faded from his face as he saw that she was gazing fixedly at a telltale mark upon his coat sleeve.

"I shall not apologize!" the girl cried accusingly. "You accepted our hospitality only to repay us by stealing the wooden shoe! There is the proof—on your sleeve!"

CHAPTER IX

CARL VANDERVORT'S ADMISSION

MR. AND MRS. VANDERVORT were shocked by their daughter's outburst.

"Katrina, go to your room at once!" her father commanded sternly.

"No! No!" the girl cried excitedly. "You must listen to me, Father! If our guest is not guilty why does he seek to remove the evidence from his sleeve?"

All eyes had turned upon Carl Vandervort, and it was true that at Katrina's accusation, his hand involuntarily had gone to his coat sleeve in a futile attempt to wipe away a long black mark.

"Soot from the chimney!" Katrina proclaimed shrilly. "When he reached up into the fireplace to remove the wooden shoe from the shelf it blackened his coat. Many a time I have struck my forearm in the same manner!"

Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort stared at their kinsman with disbelieving eyes. They appeared too stunned to speak.

Patty Rose, feeling that it was time for someone to come to Katrina's defense, said quietly:

"I did not intend to mention this, Mr. Vandervort, but—"

"Oh, I know very well what you mean to imply," the young man interrupted harshly. "I will spare you the painful duty of revealing your suspicions." He turned to face the elder Vandervort. "Sir, last evening this young lady chanced to enter the living room as I was standing by the fireplace."

"Peering up into it, I believe," Patty corrected coolly.

"Call it that if you will. It was then that I rubbed my coat sleeve and blackened it with soot."

"While you were examining the fire shovel?" Patty inquired maliciously.

"You are very observing and very clever," the man rejoined sarcastically. "I may have said that I was looking at the shovel. I have no hesitation in admitting that purely upon impulse I did gaze up into the chimney."

"Then you acknowledge that you took the wooden shoe!" Katrina exclaimed in amazement.

"I acknowledge no such thing. Such a supposition is insulting. I do admit that I was curious about the shoe and I looked for it on the chimney shelf," Carl Vandervort explained curtly.

"You deliberately questioned my little brother, Peter—"

"No, I did not. He prattled endlessly, but told me nothing I did not know. I was aware that the wooden

shoe was secreted in the chimney, for I saw you place it there when you thought my back was turned."

"What have you done with our money?" Katrina demanded.

"I know nothing of your money or the shoe either. When I examined the chimney shelf I merely wished to look at the shoe, since all my life I have heard tales of it. The shoe was not on the shelf."

"Who but yourself could have taken it?" Katrina asked accusingly.

Carl Vandervort's cold gaze swept toward Patty Rose and Gladys.

"You have other guests in your home besides myself," he said pointedly. "I understand that these girls are strangers who came to Pelma to see the festival."

"They are my friends!" Katrina cried, deeply outraged.

"You had told them where your money was kept?"

"They knew—yes," Katrina admitted reluctantly, "but I did not come upon them trying to remove the wooden shoe from the shelf. You had no right to search for it no matter what your motive may have been, for you had our word that the shoe would be shown to you before you left here."

"Our guests are above suspicion," Mrs. Vandervort murmured.

"You disgrace us by intimating that they have had aught to do with this affair," added Katrina's father.

A slow man to anger, he now eyed the younger man with cold disdain.

"You have outraged our hospitality," he said and the words fell from his lips with a deadly precision. "You have violated the privacy of your host's home. You are no doubt a kinsman but I am thankful that the relationship is distant, for no member of our line has ever been guilty of conduct, at once so dishonorable and disgusting. I shall ask you to leave immediately."

"Now, William, you are too harsh on the young man," Mrs. Vandervort remonstrated mildly, ever tender-hearted where the feelings of others were concerned.

"He's not half harsh enough," Katrina murmured bitterly. "We should turn him over to the police."

Carl Vandervort's color rose; he clinched and unclined his hands in an effort to control the rage that seethed within him. Then without saying a word, he turned abruptly and ascended to his bedroom. Through the closed door, came the sound of the angry clatter as he assembled his belongings.

"Father!" Katrina pleaded. "Are you going to let him go away? Think of the hardships we face if you allow him to leave with all our money."

"You are very young, my daughter," Mr. Vandervort replied as if he were speaking to an impetuous child. "We have no real evidence that he stole the money or the shoe."

"The soot on his coat sleeve? Is that not evidence?
And by his own admission—"

"Katrina, you know as well as I that we of Pelma have no secrets from one another. If it became known that I had caused the arrest of a kinsman for thievery when he was a guest in our own house, the name of Vandervort would lose much of the respect in which it is held today. Rather than that, I would prefer to see a guilty man escape."

"But Father, I want my hundred and fifty dollars back again! You do not realize what this will mean to us—"

"I realize far more than do you, Katrina. This is a crushing blow."

"Do not allow the man to leave without at least searching his luggage, Father."

Katrina's words were cut short by the appearance of Carl Vandervort at the foot of the stairway, heavily encumbered with his suitcases. He set his burden down and ignoring all other persons in the room, bowed coldly to Mrs. Vandervort.

"May I offer you my thanks for your hospitality?" he inquired in a tone tinged with sarcasm. "You at least have an understanding heart."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort stood mute, and Katrina, fairly beside herself with the knowledge that they meant to do nothing, sprang forward and seized one of the suitcases.

"You cannot leave here without giving up the stolen funds!" she cried. "I shall look in your bags myself if you will not open them willingly."

Carl Vandervort whirled unexpectedly upon her, jerking the bag from the startled girl's hand.

"This is the final affront to my honor!" he exclaimed furiously. "I will tolerate no more!"

Seizing his luggage, he pushed past Katrina and left the house.

No one spoke for a moment, and then Katrina, dropping into the nearest chair, buried her face in her hands and wept.

"Our money is gone. Oh, Father, why didn't you try to stop him?"

William Vandervort made no attempt to answer. He glanced appealingly at his wife, and then quietly went out to his garden. He tried to finish weeding a flower bed, but instead he could be seen leaning on his hoe, gazing absently into space.

Mrs. Vandervort and the girls endeavored to console Katrina, but there was very little they could say to cheer her. An atmosphere of deep gloom had settled over the household.

"By the way," Patty inquired thoughtfully as they discussed every angle of the disheartening affair, "I suppose all of the doors were securely fastened last night?"

"Why, no, they weren't," Mrs. Vandervort admitted. "We seldom lock up for I never heard of a house in Pelma being entered."

"I sleep directly over the living room," Katrina added. "If anyone had broken in, I feel certain I should have awakened."

"Yet you failed to hear Carl Vandervort or whoever it was—come down the stairs during the night."

"That is true," Katrina agreed reluctantly. "I believe he must have stolen the money late yesterday afternoon. Perhaps he had just taken it when you came upon him unexpectedly, Patty."

"Everything points to that conclusion," Patty nodded, "and yet I can't help wondering—"

"Surely, you don't think I made a mistake in accusing him?" Katrina asked in amazement. "The soot on his sleeve, his refusal to allow me to examine his luggage—"

"Yes, in the absence of any other evidence, I think you were right," Patty said quickly, for she saw that her friend was becoming excited again. "Do you mind if I look at the chimney shelf?"

"There is nothing to see now," Katrina answered. "It is empty."

Patty crossed over to the fireplace, and crouching down, ran her hand up to the shelf. Then she peered as far as she could into the blackened flue.

"Has the smoke chamber been repaired recently?" she questioned after a moment. "I notice that there appears to have been some work done here."

"Oh, yes, the fire did not draw as it should. Last week Father had the smoke chamber altered."

"By a local workman?"

"Wilhelm Proost did the work."

"Then he must have seen the wooden shoe on this shelf," Patty remarked reflectively.

"Oh, no, we were careful to remove the wooden shoe before he came," Katrina explained.

"Yet he must have seen the shelf, and if he had any imagination at all it would be easy to guess what purpose it served."

"I think many townsfolk do suspect that we keep a large sum of money in the house," Mrs. Vandervort said, looking worried. "Wilhelm Proost is a talkative man. Oh, dear, if I thought we had falsely accused our kinsman, I could never forgive myself."

"It was Carl who took the money," Katrina declared vehemently. "I am very sure of it."

"I didn't mean to hint otherwise," Patty said quickly. "I was just trying to think of every possibility."

Mrs. Vandervort now turned to the girls, saying earnestly:

"I know that I do not need to make this request. It would distress me deeply if the townspeople were to

learn what occurred in our house this morning. You will not speak of it?"

Both Patty Rose and Gladys gave their word that they would remain silent.

Mrs. Vandervort had tried to maintain a serene attitude, but actually the loss of so much money left her physically ill. Pleading a headache, she retired to her room.

"I may as well clean up the vacated bedroom," Katrina told her friends with a grimace of distaste. "Peter will want to sleep there tonight instead of on the cot."

"Let us help you," Patty suggested. "We have an hour or two to waste."

Katrina demurred, feeling that it was not suitable for guests to assist with the cleaning work. However, Patty and Gladys followed her to the broom closet, and selected their own dusting cloths.

The girls climbed the stairs to the bedroom so recently occupied by Carl Vandervort. As Katrina opened the door, the stale odor of cigarette smoke assailed them, and she rushed to the window to throw up the sash.

"Just look at this room!" she exclaimed indignantly.

Cigarette ashes were scattered on the dresser top and the hooked rugs. A small brown-edged hole had been burned in the handmade quilt, proof that the thought-

less guest had smoked in bed. A book had been taken from the wall shelf and carelessly tossed aside. The writing desk was in disarray.

Katrina flew at the work with an energy which her friends could not duplicate. She saw dirt where they could find none, and whenever she came upon a new trace of the guest's careless use of the room, berated him soundly.

"From the first moment, I distrusted that man," she declared bitterly. "I sensed immediately that he came here for no honest purpose."

"He couldn't have known that your savings were in the wooden shoe until after he arrived," Patty remarked. "What do you think brought him to Pelma, Katrina?"

"I do not know. Perhaps he thought he might recover the Beauvis tapestries. Learning that they were gone, he stole our money instead."

"Carl Vandervort didn't give the appearance of one who needed money especially," Gladys commented. "He was well dressed."

"It rather seemed to me that Mr. Vandervort was interested in the wooden shoe for its own sake rather than the money," Patty added.

Katrina did not reply as she briskly swept the floor. The girls worked in silence for a time, and then Patty spoke again, asking musingly:

"Katrina, assuming that someday the Beauvis tapes-

tries should be recovered, to whom would they belong?"

"Why, to all the descendants of the two brothers, Hans and Carl Vandervort. As I understand it, the tapestries were part of their joint property."

"Then young Carl Vandervort would be entitled to a share?"

"Yes, and from what he told Father he would receive at least half the proceeds, for he claims to be the only remaining descendant of the original Carl. Why do you ask? There is no hope of recovering the tapestries."

"I was only curious," Patty answered vaguely. "It's a failing of mine."

Katrina gathered up the soiled linen from the bed, and with all the quilts, bundled it into a great roll.

"I shall wash everything," she declared. "The entire room is saturated with the odor of smoke."

Katrina carried the bedding downstairs and Gladys went with her to shake the dust from several scatter rugs. Left to herself, Patty began to rearrange the papers on the desk. A few crumpled envelopes had been tossed into the waste basket, but in retrieving them she found they were of no interest.

Patty straightened the blotter pad which protected the highly polished surface of the desk, and in so doing, noticed a few blurred ink marks. Instantly her mind stirred to attention.

"Carl Vandervort must have written a letter here," she thought.

The blotter had taken several sentences very neatly, but it was impossible to read the words for they appeared backwards. Patty stared at the writing for a moment, and then took up the pad and carried it to a mirror. She gave a gasp of surprise, for the message which Carl Vandervort had written was now discernible.

"Gladys! Katrina!" she called excitedly, darting to the bedroom door. "Come here quickly!"

CHAPTER X

THE ABANDONED HOUSE

"WHAT is the matter, Patty Rose?" Gladys asked as she came hurrying up the stairway with Katrina. "Must you yell like a wild Indian?"

"Just see what I've found!" Patty waved the blotting pad before her friend's eyes.

"It's only a blotter," Gladys observed calmly.

"Only a blotter," Patty echoed gaily, "but a very obliging one. Take a look at it in the mirror."

She held the pad up before the looking glass of the dresser, so that both girls could see the excerpt. Gladys read it aloud:

"'Have not yet found the wooden shoe but will continue—'"

"Carl Vandervort must have written that sentence," Patty declared. "It's a part of a letter, but the rest is so blurred one can't make it out. This practically proves that he came here to obtain the wooden shoe!"

"Oh, I knew it! I knew it!" Katrina cried angrily. "And Father allowed him to escape. I am certain Carl had the shoe secreted in his luggage when he left here."

"There's no question about the man's guilt," Gladys agreed. "Is it too late to catch him now?"

"It might not be, if only Father would take action."

"Show him this blotter and he may change his mind," Gladys urged.

"You do not know Father, but I will try."

Katrina took the blotter from Patty Rose, and carried it down to the garden where her father was working. Patty and Gladys remained in the bedroom, watching from the window. They saw Mr. Vandervort read the excerpt in a small hand mirror which his daughter offered him. The two talked earnestly for some moments, but the elderly man kept shaking his head.

"He's telling her he will do nothing," Gladys declared. "Did you ever hear of such a stubborn attitude?"

"His viewpoint is different from ours," Patty rejoined. "Besides, there's something queer about the entire affair. I can't believe that Carl Vandervort came here to steal money. If he took the family savings it was merely incidental to the theft of the shoe."

"But why should he want the wooden shoe, Patty?"

"I've been trying to figure it out. It strikes me that he must know something about the shoe of which the others are in ignorance."

"You mean the strange markings on the under side?"

"Yes, the obvious explanation would be that he has the key to the code."

"And that he is after the famous Beauvis tapes-tries?"

"My theory hasn't stretched quite that far yet," Patty smiled. "But it's something to think about at least."

Katrina came running back upstairs, thoroughly disheartened because her father would not take action against Carl Vandervort.

"Oh, well, probably it would have been too late to catch the man anyway," Gladys commented. "By this time he's likely well on his way to New York."

"There is no train for half an hour. He might still be at the station." A light of grim determination came into her eyes. "I am going there to talk with him!"

"I'll go with you if you wish," Gladys offered.

Both girls gazed expectantly at Patty Rose, but she remained silent. When Katrina had gone from the room to get her hat, Gladys urged her friend to accompany them.

"No, you will only antagonize Mr. Vandervort," Patty advised sensibly. "Besides, I have an idea Carl will not be found at the railroad station."

Gladys had no opportunity to inquire why her friend held such a belief, for just then Katrina came back into the room. The two girls hastened away from the house, but in less than an hour they were back again, discouraged and tired.

"You were right, Patty," Gladys admitted as she threw herself on the bed. "We waited until train time, but the man never did show up."

"We thought he might have hired an automobile," Katrina contributed gloomily, "so we went to all the garages. No one had seen him."

"Did you inquire at the hotel?"

"We never even thought of that," Katrina responded in surprise. "He surely wouldn't go back there."

"I have some more bad news to report," Gladys declared, looking at Patty. "We start back to Dalton early this afternoon."

"Oh, so soon?" Patty asked in disappointment.

"Yes, Mother waylaid me a moment ago. She said we must have our bags packed by two o'clock."

"I'll not want to see you girls leave," Katrina said earnestly. "We were having such a nice time together—until Carl Vandervort ruined everything."

"I wish I could help you recover your money—or find the Beauvis tapestries," Patty replied soberly. "Dalton is such a long way from Pelma."

"I fear it will be a case of 'East is East and West is West and n'er the twain shall meet,'" Katrina quoted sadly. "But at least we can write."

"Will you do that, Katrina?" Patty asked eagerly. "Will you keep us posted as to how matters are going here?"

"I'll write every week, if you will too."

"Of course." Patty glanced quickly at her wrist-watch. "There's still an hour and a half before it will be time for us to meet Mr. and Mrs. Baker at the Inn. Katrina, do you suppose we could explore the old Vandervort house?"

"Why, certainly. I'll get the key. But I warn you it's only a dusty, vacant place."

"Patty thinks she may find the tapestries for you, Katrina," Gladys said teasingly.

"No such thing! I'm not that conceited I hope."

"The house has been searched from top to bottom a dozen times," Katrina remarked with a smile. "For years Peter and I made it our hobby."

"I realize there is no hope of recovering the tapestries after all these years," Patty defended herself. "I'm merely curious to see the inside of that old house."

"I'll get the key now," Katrina said, and darted down the stairs.

The two girls joined her a minute later and they all walked to the Hans Vandervort house. Katrina unlocked the rear door, but it had warped fast, so that it required their combined strength to push it open.

"There's really nothing to see," Katrina declared as they entered a large, empty, central room with a smoke-blackened stone fireplace at one end. "The air is close and we can't open a window either for they are all nailed down."

"This one doesn't seem to be," Patty replied. She

had tested a window along the north wall, and now flung it up.

"Why, that's odd," Katrina said, looking startled. "I am sure that window has always been nailed down. Father made everything secure so that the boys of the village wouldn't try to get inside."

"Nevertheless, someone has been in this house very recently, Katrina."

"Why do you think so, Patty?"

"Look at the window sill."

"The layer of dust has been disturbed," Katrina noted instantly. "But you did that in opening the window, didn't you?"

Patty Rose shook her head. "No, I noticed it right away and was careful not to touch the sill."

"I don't see who would want to break in," Katrina frowned. "There's nothing here anyone could steal except some old worthless furniture upstairs in the loft."

"Whoever it was, evidently pried open this window," Patty observed as she examined the outside of the sill. "You can see where a blunt object has been used here."

"I can't imagine who would do such a thing," Katrina murmured. "It must have been done at night too, for during the day someone is nearly always around the place. Do you think Carl would dare to break in?"

"I believe he would if it happened to suit his fancy," Gladys contributed. "But I know he didn't leave his room before two o'clock last night, for I heard him pacing up and down until that hour."

"There would be no sense in such an act either," Katrina said thoughtfully. "If he had wished to come here, we would have given him the key."

The girls wandered about the lower floor, seeking for evidence of vandalism. So far as Katrina could tell, no damage had been done anywhere. The bleak, empty rooms, each with its fireplace, held scant interest even for Patty Rose, and the three soon went up the steep, creaking stairs to the second floor.

There were four small bedrooms, likewise stuffy and empty. The wall paper was blackened with smoke and grime; Patty asked if it were not the original.

"No, I think not," Katrina rejoined, "but it's ages old. In the northwest bedroom, where a strip has peeled off you can see the first wall paper."

She led them to an adjoining room, indicating a place directly above the fireplace. Patty moved closer to examine the exposed strip of wall paper. It was a heavy covering, with a quaint picture design.

"It is an old French paper," Katrina told her friends. "Imported of course. Hans Vandervort had good taste and he always bought the best of everything."

"The condition of this house reveals that it was

unusually well built," Patty replied. "Even the plaster is still in excellent condition."

"Yes, it is Mother's dream to fix everything as it was years ago. That is out of the question now."

"You mean because your money is gone?" Patty asked.

"Yes, we were counting upon it for so many purposes. Now I don't know what will become of us—but why should I worry you with our troubles? You probably have enough of your own."

The girls left the bedroom and returned to the hall, at the extreme end of which rose a rickety wooden ladder.

"Where does that go?" Patty inquired.

"To the loft. I believe I'll climb up and see if any of the old furniture has been taken."

She cautiously climbed the ladder. Gladys and Patty, determined to miss nothing, started to follow.

"Have a care," Katrina warned. "The third rung is weak."

The loft was dark and hot, lighted by only one small window beneath the rafters. At first Patty could see nothing, then she made out a few dust covered objects, an old chest of unpainted drawers, several broken chairs, an ancient secretary.

"I can't see that anything has been touched," Katrina said, looking carefully about. "It would not

matter greatly if these pieces were stolen for they are valueless."

"That fine old secretary?" Patty questioned.

"It is only maple and deeply scarred. For some reason Hans Vandervort treasured it. I imagine because it made such a convenient place to store his many papers."

"What became of the contents?" Patty asked curiously as she walked over to open one of the drawers.

"Oh, the secretary was cleaned of all papers long before it came into our possession. Father's sister who is now dead, destroyed many documents before she realized that they might have value. You'll find nothing there now."

As Patty carelessly closed the empty drawer it seemed to her that she heard the faint rustle of paper. To the astonishment of the other two girls, she pulled the receptacle out on the floor, and ran her hand far back into the hole.

"What are you trying to do now, Patty Rose?" Gladys demanded.

"There's a paper of some sort caught under the drawer. I want to see what it is."

"You and your sleuthing!" Gladys scoffed, but the next instant she became wide-eyed as Patty triumphantly brought forth a folded yellow paper.

"What have you found?" Katrina asked, growing

excited. "Why, that looks like my great grandfather's writing!"

The girls carried the paper down to the second floor where the light was much better.

"I can't make anything of it," Patty said, offering her discovery to Katrina. "It seems to be written in Dutch!"

"Why, this isn't my great grandfather's writing after all," Katrina announced in surprise. "It seems to be some sort of document, and it's signed by Hans' brother, Carl!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BEAUVIS TAPESTRIES

"CAN you read the paper?" Patty questioned eagerly.

"Oh, yes," Katrina nodded, "but the writing has faded so. It's hard to puzzle out the words."

She studied the paper for some minutes, her face reflecting varying emotions of surprise, bewilderment and pleasure.

"Girls, this is amazing! Imagine this paper coming to light after all these years. Patty, you are truly remarkable in your ability to discover things!"

"Tell me what it says or I'll never find anything more for you," Patty Rose threatened with a laugh.

"Why, it appears to be some sort of formal agreement between Hans Vandervort and his brother, Carl. Would you call it a bill of sale? For certain considerations, Carl gives up all claim to the Beauvis tapes-tries!"

"Then that makes the members of your line the only heirs in the event they ever come to light!" Patty cried jubilantly.

"So it does," Katrina agreed, beaming. Then her

face fell. "But this paper means nothing after all, for the tapestries cannot be found."

"Just turn Patty Rose loose on the problem," Gladys chuckled. "She'll find them for you."

"I only wish I could," Patty smiled. "Unfortunately, I seem to be better at discovering mysteries than I am at solving them. I don't suppose this old house has any secret hiding places?"

"If it does have they are still secret," Katrina replied. "Shall we go back home now? I should like to show this paper to my parents."

"Patty and I ought to be packing our bags too," Gladys added anxiously. "It must be growing late."

The girls were very quiet as Katrina locked the door of the old dwelling. The moment of parting was now close at hand and it made them sorrowful to think that they might never see each other again.

Upon reaching the Vandervort home, Patty and Gladys were dismayed to observe the Baker automobile drawn up at the curbing.

"Your parents are waiting for us now!" Patty exclaimed. "We must hurry."

They ran up the stairway to their rooms, fairly throwing their garments into suitcases.

"I hate to leave," Gladys said, with a last wistful glance about the sunny room. "It seems almost as if we're deserting Katrina in her hour of need."

"Yes, it does. But we can't stay here forever."

Mr. and Mrs. Vandervort, Katrina and Peter, gathered about the car to bid their friends goodbye.

"You'll write, won't you?" Patty asked Katrina, although the girl already had given her promise.

Mr. Baker pressed a generous sum of money into Mrs. Vandervort's hand.

"No, no, we can't take this," the woman murmured, but her protests were ignored.

At last the car rolled away and until it turned at the first corner, the little Vandervort family could be seen waving from their door.

"We ought to make Dalton in three hours if the traffic isn't too heavy," Mr. Baker remarked briskly, as he steered the car through the narrow streets.

Slumped dejectedly in the rear seat, Patty Rose and Gladys exchanged a glance. Dalton! How could they bear to go back to such a prosaic town after spending such glorious days in Pelma?

Suddenly Patty Rose straightened in the seat. The car was passing very close to the Inn. She hesitated, and then apologetically asked Mr. Baker if he were in a great hurry.

"Why, not especially, Patty. Have you forgotten anything?"

"I have an errand I'd like to do for Katrina. If you don't mind waiting, it will only take five minutes."

Mr. Baker obediently pulled the car to the curbing.

Gladys gave her friend a quick, speculative glance, for she knew of no errand that they had promised to look after for Katrina.

Without offering an explanation, Patty ran up the street and disappeared into the Inn. Ten minutes later she returned, breathless from hurrying so fast.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," she apologized.

"We have plenty of time," Mr. Baker replied.

Although her parents did not appear to notice, it was evident to Gladys that Patty was deeply excited. Her eyes were bright and she had a preoccupied air as the car traveled toward the main highway.

"What were you doing at the Inn?" Gladys asked in a whisper when the car was speeding smoothly along the country road. "Or is it a dark secret?"

"There's no secret about it. I had a sudden hunch! I wanted to learn if Carl Vandervort had registered at the hotel."

"Again? Why, he left town."

"Oh, no, he didn't," Patty corrected triumphantly. "Just as I suspected, he moved right back in."

Gladys looked puzzled.

"I can't understand that, Patty. He had gained his objective. I should think he'd be afraid the Vandervorts might change their minds and have him arrested."

"Carl has little to fear on that score. Save for that

excerpt from the letter, the evidence against him is very slight. Of course he can't know that we found the telltale blotter."

"But why should he care to remain in Pelma, Patty?"

"Obviously, because he hasn't attained the thing he is after."

"If he has the Vandervort's money and their wooden shoe—"

"He still might be after the Beauvis tapestries."

"You have those old tapestries on the brain!" Gladys scoffed. "No one has wanted them in all these years, except Katrina's family. Why should a stranger suddenly become excited over them?"

"It's barely possible new evidence has been uncovered by Carl."

"It doesn't sound reasonable to me. If Carl had happened on the key to the wooden shoe code, as you once suggested, he'd just find out where the tapestries are supposed to be hidden and go after them!"

"My theory exactly," Patty nodded. "That's why I think Carl Vandervort is risking arrest to remain in Pelma. He has a clue to the location of the tapestries and he means to run it down."

"You certainly have a fertile imagination."

"Then you explain why the man stayed in Pelma," Patty challenged.

"Maybe just because he wanted to see the festival."

"That's a dandy reason, isn't it? Anyway, the festival ends today. No, Carl Vandervort means to make trouble for Katrina and her family."

"He's done about all he can now, it seems to me. Even if he should stumble upon those Beauvis tapestries—and I doubt that they still exist—he'd have no claim to them for that paper you found today in the loft gives clear title to Katrina's family."

"If Carl found the tapestries first no one would ever hear about it. That man is shrewd."

"Well, if all your suspicions are sound, the Vandervorts are simply crazy not to swear out a warrant for his arrest," Gladys said with a shrug. "But we may as well forget about it."

"Yes," Patty agreed reluctantly, "our little interlude of adventure is over."

While it was easy enough for the girls to decide that they would think no more of Carl Vandervort and his strange connection with their Pelma friends, it was quite another matter to return to the hum-drum routine of Dalton life.

Nearly every hour of the day Patty caught herself recalling some incident which had occurred at Pelma. She thought almost constantly of Katrina, and wondered how the girl was faring. Many hours were wasted watching for the postman.

Three days elapsed and still no word came from Pelma. Patty worried for fear Katrina did not mean

to write. Frequently she speculated upon the girl's reactions upon learning that Carl Vandervort had reregistered at the village inn.

Upon the day of her return home, Patty had written Katrina, and in thanking her for the hospitality extended, had added the information concerning Carl. She anticipated an immediate reply and could not understand why it failed to come.

"Three days isn't long, child," her mother declared, but on Patty Rose's calendar it seemed to cover far more than a mere seventy-two hours.

And then finally, the expected letter arrived, but oddly enough, Katrina made no reference to her kinsman. The girl wrote briefly and in a constrained, impersonal vein, which somehow did not sound like Katrina at all. Only one paragraph gripped Patty's attention. She read it several times.

"Our financial condition is even worse than I knew," Katrina wrote. "We must raise money at once, and Father has decided not to try to hold the old Vandervort property any longer. The house, together with some ten acres of land, has been heavily mortgaged for years and now must be sold at a sheriff's sale. It is a hard blow for all of us, but Father seems to take it to heart the most."

"What a pity," Gladys commented, when Patty showed her the letter. "While that old house is practically a ruin, the Vandervorts love every brick in it."

"Katrina is all broken up over the matter—you can read that between the lines. It's queer she failed to mention Carl in her letter. I wonder if he is still in Pelma?"

The girls only could speculate, a pastime which was far from satisfying. Patty became so subdued and gloomy that various members of her family commented upon it.

"What's the matter, Pat?" her brother Jack asked one afternoon. "You moon around like you'd lost your last friend."

"You can't expect me to feel cheerful when some very dear friends are about to lose everything they own."

"Oh, you ought to forget those Dutchmen down in Pelma, Patty. There's nothing you can do about it."

"Please don't call them 'those Dutchmen,' Jack. The Vandervorts and their friends are among the finest people I've ever met."

"Oh, all right, I'm sorry," Jack apologized. "I didn't mean anything. But that's not what I want to talk about. Say, how would you like to go on a weiner roast this afternoon?" he demanded suddenly with a wide grin.

Patty was icing a chocolate cake. The knife fell from her hand. She stared incredulously at her brother.

"A weiner roast!" she echoed.

"That's it. Each boy can invite one girl. And your big-hearted brother is asking little you."

Patty was pleased at the prospect of attending the weiner roast for it was not often that Jack condescended to take her anywhere. Jack's group was several years older than the friends with whom Patty usually associated, and in worldly wisdom and experience the boys and girls considered themselves to be quite superior indeed.

Then Patty's secret jubilation suffered a severe setback. She remembered that Jack had been talking on the phone earlier in the day and she had heard such phrases from his lips as, "Come on, Alice! Please, Alice!" and "Just this one time, Alice!"

Patty looked at her brother with an impish twinkle in her eyes. "Why the sudden switch, Jack?" she asked. "I thought you were taking Alice Kinsman."

"How did you know that?" Jack demanded before he thought.

"Oh, you aren't hard to read. No brother is. No, this is how it happened: You had your heart set upon taking Alice, but maybe she doesn't like your style, or the way you wear your clothes, or your neckties. So here you are, short one girl, and the weiner roast right around the corner. There was only one way out, to take the little sister. Am I right, Jack?"

"You don't have to go if that's the way you feel about it."

"Now listen, Jack, I didn't say I wouldn't go, did I? I don't mind pinch-hitting for Alice. Fact is, I think brothers and sisters ought to be willing to accommodate each other in such small matters. I'll be ready before you are. Shall I take some food along?"

"That cake might come in handy," Jack said, eyeing the rich delicacy ravenously. "The fellows are buying the weiners, buns and marshmallows. Oh, yes, and the mustard. But there's one thing you can do to help save the situation."

"What's that, Jack?"

"Ask Dad for the car."

"Why don't *you* ask him for it. You're the one who wants it."

"He's more likely to say yes for you."

After a little more good-natured teasing, Patty finally consented to make the request. Her father gave his permission so readily that she wondered why Jack had hesitated to ask for himself.

Once at the wooded site where the weiner roast was in progress, Patty found herself the center of attention from a group of boys and girls who were Jack's age. Although their interests were different than her own she experienced no difficulty in keeping up her end of the conversation.

Presently, growing tired of so much attention, Patty busied herself gathering dry wood for the fire. But

the boys would not have it so. They came to her assistance, taking over the task. They found larger logs and scrambled up old newspapers to serve as a torch.

Patty sat down to watch the initial flames eat into the kindling. Her gaze fell absently upon one of the torn newspapers which had been tossed carelessly on the pile of wood.

Then, just as a corner of the sheet caught, Patty came to life. She darted forward and with a cat-like sweep of her hand, snatched the flaming paper from the fire.

CHAPTER XII

A NEWSPAPER CLUE

THE boy who stood near the bonfire cried out in alarm, fearful that Patty would catch her sleeve in the flames. Dropping the burning newspaper on the ground, the girl trampled it with her shoes.

"What's the idea of trying to save that?" her companion questioned in surprise.

"Just as the paper caught fire I noticed a story on the front page that I want to read," Patty explained.

"Snatching it from the flames was a dangerous thing to do," the boy told her severely. "You might have burned yourself."

Patty spread out the charred news sheet on the ground, murmuring in disappointment as she saw that a portion of the story which she wished to read, had been destroyed. Only the headline and one paragraph remained.

"Why, that's the Saxon City Gazette," the boy observed, peering over Patty's shoulder. "What story is so important?"

She indicated the headline:

**"JAMES R. RAINNEY HOME
ENTERED BY BURGLARS."**

"Do you know James Rainey?" the boy questioned in surprise.

Patty shook her head absently as she read the brief paragraph which had not been ruined by the fire. It told only a little more than the headline, namely that during the night burglars had entered the James Rainey home in Saxon City, escaping with jewels and cash amounting to nearly two thousand dollars.

Patty's companion could not understand why she should be so deeply interested in the item, especially as the Rainey family was unknown to her. He was even more puzzled when she carried the scorched paper over to a log and sat there staring at it as if she were not seeing the words.

Upon reading the item, Patty's mind had leaped back to the night of Mrs. Harborg's treasure-hunt. Until now other events had tended to crowd from her thoughts a recollection of the two strangers observed in the woods. Her father had taken the little booklet to the police station many days before. But Patty had not forgotten the three names which were written in it, and well she remembered that the second on the list was that of J. R. Rainey.

"I wonder if James Rainey and J. R. could be the same person?" she mused. "I suspect they are."

Glancing at the dateline of the paper she saw that it had been printed two days earlier.

"I still might be able to get an undamaged copy of this news sheet," she thought. "I'm half a mind to get Jack to drive me down to Hamill's bookstore before it closes."

Losing all interest in the weiner roast, Patty looked about for her brother. He had disappeared with the automobile keys.

Jack presently sauntered into view and Patty hurried to his side. Her request drew a frown.

"I don't see why you want to go back to town now," he complained. "We arrived only a few minutes ago."

"The bookstore closes at five-thirty," Patty explained patiently. "It's nearly that now."

"Can't you get whatever it is you want tomorrow?"

"Not very well, because speed may mean everything in this matter. Give me the car keys, Jack. If you don't I'll never do you another favor as long as I live."

"Oh, I'll drive you down if you insist," Jack consented unwillingly. "But it's senseless. It will be just our luck to miss out on all the food."

Patty decided it would do no harm to take her brother into her confidence. As they walked to the car, she showed him the newspaper item. It had no significance for him until she explained that it was

her belief the unknown men who had broken into the Saxon City residence might be the same two she had seen on the night of Mrs. Harborg's party.

"Say, it seems to me you've been keeping quite a lot to yourself," Jack commented when he had heard the tale. "You're not making this up?"

"Certainly not," Patty retorted indignantly. "Did you ever know me to tell a falsehood?"

"Now don't get on your high horse," Jack chuckled. "Sure, you're a regular little George Washington, but I thought you might have dreamed it. Sounds sort of phoney to me."

"That's because you didn't see it with your own eyes. I'd practically forgotten those two men until I saw this item in the paper."

"We'll get down to the store before it closes," Jack declared. Now that he realized Patty's purpose in making the trip was a serious one, he did not mind accommodating her.

A shout of protest went up from the group of young people as the pair entered their car.

"We'll be back in ten minutes," Jack called above the roar of the motor.

At the local bookstore Patty was unable to purchase a Saxon City Gazette. Disappointed, she came back to report her failure to Jack.

"How far is Saxon City from here?" she inquired thoughtfully.

"About twenty miles. But for Pete's sake don't get the notion you want me to take you over there."

"I already have it," Patty returned gravely. "Jack, I'd like to talk with James Rainey and find out more about the burglary. If he should prove to be J. R. Rainey, there's a chance I might be able to help in tracing down the men who robbed him."

"I'll drive you over tomorrow," Jack offered.

"We oughtn't to waste even another day, Jack. Please let's go there now instead of back to the weiner roast."

Patty was certain her brother would refuse, and so was pleasantly surprised when he agreed to her request.

"All right, Pat. The picnic isn't much fun anyway. But I don't see what you expect to accomplish at Saxon City. Even if you were able to identify the burglars by a description, they would be a thousand miles from here by this time."

"Perhaps not," she rejoined thoughtfully.

During the swift ride to Saxon City, Patty, in a burst of gratitude for her brother's favor, spoke of her strange meeting with the Vandervort family in Pelma.

"I thought it was odd when I encountered a man named William Vandervort," she remarked, "but now that I've located the second man on the list it's even

more astounding. Both the Vandervort and the Rainey homes were robbed too."

"It may not be the same Rainey family, Patty."

"No, that's true. It's one of the things I'm especially eager to learn."

In Saxon City Jack inquired at a drugstore for the Rainey home and was directed toward a quiet, shady street in the residential section. The dwelling itself was a large white colonial with a long flight of steps leading up to a terrace.

"What are we going to say?" Jack asked uncertainly as he helped his sister from the car. "I suppose you will tell them that here is the girl detective and her little brother, all ready to solve the crime?"

"Be sensible, Jack. We will just ring the bell and see who answers it."

Before the young people could reach the door, however, their attention was attracted to an old colored gardener who was trimming some evergreen trees at the front of the house.

"I beg your pardon," Patty addressed the old fellow. "Is this the home of Mr. James Rainey?"

"It suah is, Miss!" the colored man beamed, doffing his straw hat. "But de boss is down at de police station now tryin' to git back the jewels that was stole."

"Is Mrs. Rainey at home?" Patty questioned.

"No, Miss. She is gone up to Maine fo' a rest. And

de maid and de cook is gone fo' de day so yo' Uncle Grover is de man o' de house. Can I do you any good, Miss?"

"Well, Uncle Grover," Patty said, determined to learn what she could from him. "We read in the paper that this house was robbed. We think we might have some information that would be useful to Mr. Rainey and the police. In the first place, can you tell us Mr. Rainey's middle initial."

"Yes, indeed. It's 'R' for Randall. Mr. James Randall Rainey is his tomb-stone name."

"You mean his full name," Patty said with a smile.

"Yes, Miss, some folks calls it dat. But he never uses it much o' de time. He calls his-self just plain James. Mr. Rainey ain't no man fo' frills."

"Tell us about the robbery, Uncle Grover," Jack put in for he was anxious to learn something about the crime.

The old colored man dropped his pruning hook and beckoned his young callers to follow him to the rear of the house. He pointed to a large airing porch on the second floor around which were built a row of flower boxes.

"De robber clumb right up over dat porch rail. He forced de lock o' de door, or maybe de door was just naturally open—I cain't say. He used dis heah ladduh."

Uncle Grover indicated a tall ladder which rested

against the trunk of an ash tree, and which recently had been used by the colored man for the purpose of trimming off scraggly branches. Instead of putting it away in the garage, he had left it out the night of the burglary.

Patty Rose stood staring up at the airing porch. She observed a peculiar thing. The center flower box was full of plants except at the left side where they seemed to be crushed and trampled.

"Uncle Grover," she said impulsively. "I want to ask you to do me a very special favor. Will you set that ladder right where you found it the morning after the robbery?"

The old gardener scratched his head as if he were thinking that the ways of some white folks just didn't make sense. Then he smiled broadly and said he would be very glad to oblige her.

The ladder was a heavy one, and Jack offered the old colored man a hand with it. Between them they placed it just where Uncle Grover directed.

"Dere she is," he said at last. "Dat's de very spot."

Patty took a quick mental note and saw that the ladder stood just to the side of the trampled plants.

"If you don't mind," she said, "I'd like to go up there."

Without waiting to hear if there were any objections, the girl climbed up the rungs with surprising agility, pausing when she reached the flower box.

She parted the crushed plants. There in the moist soil was the imprint of a man's shoe. The sole was barely distinguishable but the heel had left a perfect mark.

"I've found something, Jack," she called down to her brother who was gazing up at her with long-suffering disapproval written all over his face.

"What? A new variety of petunia?" he asked teasingly.

"The robber left his calling card as he stepped from the ladder and lifted himself over the porch railing," Patty cried in excitement. "The footprint is plainly visible."

"Are you sure?" Jack called back, his attitude undergoing a swift change. "Come on down and let me have a look."

With one last glance into the flower box, Patty descended the ladder and allowed her brother to climb up and inspect the shoepoint.

"Maybe the police already have seen it," Patty said in a calmer tone.

"The police neveh look in dat floweh box," Uncle Grover told her.

"Then we should call this footprint to their attention," Patty declared. "I wish Mr. Rainey were here."

Scarcely had she spoken when an automobile came rolling up the gravel driveway. As a stout, middle-aged man alighted, Jack hastily descended the ladder,

feeling embarrassed to be caught in such a position. Patty however, was not dismayed.

She calmly introduced herself and after telling Mr. Rainey of her discovery on the airing porch, offered full particulars regarding the little booklet found in the woods.

"Well, that's a queer thing," the man remarked. "I don't know either of those men, Vandervort or Elias Parkson. I've heard of Parkson though. He's a well-to-do merchant at Linden."

Patty took note of this information, and then inquired if any clues had been found concerning the identity of the house-breakers. Mr. Rainey did not seem to resent her questions, but inviting the young people into the house told them everything about the affair.

"I was awakened about two o'clock by a sound downstairs," he reported. "I switched on the hall light and started to go down to investigate. An outside door slammed and I saw two men dart away. They sprang into a waiting car and disappeared, traveling west."

"You didn't see either of the men clearly I suppose?" Jack questioned politely.

"Well, no, I didn't, for they were running and kept their faces covered. One was a tall, thin man in a dark overcoat. He wore a felt hat which was pulled low over his eyes."

"Why, that description would fit the pickpocket who attacked old Mr. Wittenstine in Pelma!" Patty exclaimed.

"It would fit almost anyone I fear," Mr. Rainey smiled ruefully. "The police say it is almost worthless."

"It's too bad you didn't have time to take down the license number of the car," Patty observed.

"I got the first two numbers," Mr. Rainey answered with grim satisfaction. "6—4."

"It wasn't an Illinois number?" Jack asked, sitting up very straight.

"Yes, it was, young man. Do you think you have seen the car somewhere?"

"I not only saw it—I worked on it for almost two hours!" Jack exclaimed. "Those two strangers who drove into Hinkman's garage must have been the pair who broke into your house!"

"And I'm certain they're the same two who dropped the booklet in the woods!" Patty added. "Oh, Jack, if only you could furnish a description of them."

"I'd recognize them anywhere if I were only to run into them again."

Mr. Rainey arose from his chair.

"We're going to the police station," he said crisply. "Even if you can't remember how the men looked, there is an excellent chance you may recognize them in the rogue's gallery."

CHAPTER XIII

THROUGH AN OPEN WINDOW

MR. RAINES's huge sedan rumbled down the driveway while Patty and Jack followed in their modest coupe. Upon their way to the police station, the girl and boy spoke to each other in monosyllables, for they were both intent upon their own thoughts.

Once in the building however, they became more voluble, for the detective who had been assigned to the Rainey burglary case was keen to hear anything they might have to report.

Patty served as the main spokesman, relating how she and Gladys had chanced to find the little booklet containing the names of William Vandervort, James Rainey and Elias Parkson; and how her brother Jack had helped repair an automobile whose owners excited his suspicion.

"Young man, can you describe these men?" the detective asked incisively.

"Not very well. One was tall and slender. He wore a floppy-brimmed Fedora hat. He seemed to be very nervous and high-strung. His actions were

quick; almost jerky. His voice was harsh with a husky note in it."

"That description is all right as far as it goes," the detective remarked. "But the only physical features in it are that the man was tall and slender. The world is full of tall, slender characters. Can't you give me a detailed description of say, his face? Did he have a big nose, any warts, moles, birthmarks? Was his mouth large or small, thin or thick lips? You get the idea?"

Jack was in a quandary. Try as he would, he could not recall any of the man's individual features, although he felt certain that he would recognize him on sight. He stammered a few perplexed words, but the detective laughed and remarked that the power of definite observation was an uncommon gift.

"How about the other fellow, young man?" he asked presently. "What can you tell us about him?"

"He seemed to be the silent partner," Jack contributed. "He let the other man do all the talking. He was dark complected, I remember, and looked at you out of little shifty, green-looking eyes."

"Well now, you did hit upon a definite observation that time! Shifty, green-looking eyes isn't bad, although that sort of optics is by no means rare in the underworld."

Mr. Rainey had said very little thus far except to introduce the young people to the officer.

"Here is the point," he now suggested. "While Jack's description of the pair may be sketchy, it tallies exactly with my fleeting impression of the two men. One of the robbers was tall and slender and wore a limber-brimmed Fedora."

"I had thought of that, Mr. Rainey," the officer replied. "I do not doubt that you both saw the same pair. But come! Let's step into the rogue's gallery. Perhaps the young man will see something to freshen his memory."

He led the way down the corridor and the party was admitted into another room by a smiling attendant.

As Patty's eyes roved up and down the long rows of photographs she felt a distinct shock. Leering faces, drunken faces, cruel faces, dissipated faces—whole batteries of faces seemed to make a disagreeable physical impact upon her mind, mocking every feeling of wholesome decency.

Jack walked slowly past the pictures, studying them closely. He became more and more bewildered.

"I don't see either of the men here," he was compelled to admit.

"Can you pick out a face which comes the nearest to it?" he was asked.

After considerable indecision, Jack selected one, saying that it slightly resembled the taller of the two men.

"Do you have any pickpockets in this gallery?"
Patty inquired abruptly.

"No, those pictures are kept separately. But I hardly think it would be worth while to examine them. House breaking and petty theft seldom are committed by the same individual."

"And yet there was evidence—or so it seems to me—that the house breaking might have been done by a first offender."

"What makes you think that?" the detective asked with an amused smile.

"Because it doesn't seem to me that an old hand at house entering would be so stupid as to leave the imprint of his shoe in a flower box."

"What was that?" the detective questioned in a puzzled tone.

"The Saxon City police force overlooked an important clue," Mr. Rainey cut in, deliberately trying to plague the man. "You detectives were so busy taking fingerprints that you failed to see one of the most conspicuous bits of evidence on the place."

Patty could not help but admire the detective. Instead of showing annoyance upon hearing about the heel print, he thanked the group for bringing it to his attention and promised that a man would be sent immediately to the Rainey house to make a thorough examination of the flower box and a casting of the print.

"I admit that our investigation up to this point has been more or less routine," he said. "With so few

clues available it seemed rather hopeless to apprehend the pair. But now we may have something upon which we can work."

"How about this pickpocket angle?" Mr. Rainey inquired. "I'm in favor of investigating every possible clue."

The detective nodded, and summoning a member of the force, asked that a certain group of pictures be brought to him. These were shown to Patty, who turned through them slowly. Suddenly she came to a photograph which held her attention.

"This looks a great deal like the man who took Mr. Wittenstine's pocketbook," she declared. "I can't be certain, of course, for I caught only a fleeting glimpse of him."

"That fellow is Darrell Jennings," the detective told her. "He has been arrested twice on petty charges and once served a six months sentence in the state prison. We'll try to trace him."

When Jack, Patty and Mr. Rainey finally left the police station it was long past the dinner hour. Street lights were on and a clock in a jeweler's window revealed that it was after eight o'clock.

"Mother and Dad will think something has happened to us," Patty said in alarm. "We ought to telephone and explain."

After parting with Mr. Rainey, Jack drove toward the business section. Patty noticed a painted banner

which had been stretched across the main street, and called her brother's attention to it.

"There seems to have been some sort of carnival here recently, Jack. The advertisement is still up."

"A barbecue," he responded indifferently. "It was quite a success from what I heard."

Patty twisted in the car seat, trying to read the words on the street banner. The barbecue had been a three day affair.

"Why, Jack, that's an odd thing."

"What is?" her brother inquired gruffly.

"The barbecue was held here the very night that Mr. Rainey's house was entered."

"What's so startling about that?"

"I was just thinking—" Patty said thoughtfully.

"The Vandervort home was visited by a thief during the Pelma celebration. Now we find that Mr. Rainey's house was burglarized at a time when conditions must have been very similar. I wonder if there can be any connection?"

"I don't see how," Jack responded. "Anyway, from what you tell me of the Vandervort affair, I gather that Carl made off with the wooden shoe and the money."

"Katrina thinks so. I admit I did too at first. Now I don't know what I believe."

"You've discovered quite a bit for one day," Jack grinned. "Better let it go at that."

He parked the car in the business section of Saxon City, suggesting that they stop at a local cafe for supper.

"All right," Patty agreed. "I'm starving."

Before searching for a restaurant, they went to a corner drugstore, telephoning home to their parents and explaining that they would not reach Dalton for another hour.

"That place just up the street looks clean and inviting," Patty said, indicating a sign which bore the words: "Mad Hatter's Tearoom." "Shall we try it?"

"It's apt to be all fuss and no food," Jack complained, but as there was no other restaurant within sight, he did not resist when Patty tugged at his hand.

The little tearoom was deserted of patrons, but the white-haired woman who came to serve the boy and girl assured them that it was not too late to order a warm meal.

"Do you own the tearoom?" Patty asked, for she enjoyed starting a conversation.

"Oh, yes," the woman replied with a smile. "I took it over about a year ago. I remodeled it according to my own ideas, and I do all of my own cooking."

"The decorations are very attractive," Patty praised, gazing about the room.

The freshly painted walls were ornamented with illustrations from Alice in Wonderland; the lamp bases at each table were replicas of the Mad Hatter himself,

holding a teacup in his hand. In the front window were luxuriant ferns and tropical plants; there were many gay flowers, neatly potted.

"You like plants, don't you?" Patty inquired with interest. "What is that one over there in the corner?"

"A purple gloxinia," the woman answered, smiling. "I do enjoy flowers but they require a great deal of care. Would you like to see my cactus garden?"

"Indeed I should."

While Jack studied the menu, weighing the respective merits of swiss steak or scalloped potatoes and ham, the owner of the tearoom led Patty to the front window, showing her a large box which contained some twenty different specimens of cactus.

"I collected a number of plants when I was in Arizona," she explained proudly. "Since then I've made it my hobby to raise as many different varieties as I can. There are no two alike in my collection."

Patty admired the box of curious specimens and turned as if to return to the table where Jack awaited her impatiently. Then she became rigidly motionless, staring at another object in the window, one which was half covered by the long trailing fronds of the fern.

It was a red geranium which had been planted in an old wooden shoe.

CHAPTER XIV

A RED GERANIUM

"WHERE did you get that?" Patty Rose gasped, pointing to the potted flower.

"Do you mean my geranium?" the tearoom owner asked disparagingly. "It is a sickly plant. I shouldn't keep it in the front window only it needs sunlight."

"No, no! I mean the container—the old wooden shoe!"

"Why, it came into my possession in a very strange way," the woman answered. "I thought it would make a unique pot for the geranium, but the plant is not doing well without drainage. I must bore some holes in the bottom of the shoe."

"Oh, don't do that!" Patty cried before she thought.

The tearoom owner regarded her quizzically.

"I mean, it would be a pity to ruin such a handsome old shoe," Patty amended hastily.

She could not take her eyes from the wooden shoe. It looked so much like the one lost by the Vandervort family. It could not be, of course, she told herself, for the kindly-faced tearoom owner surely was not a thief.

Before Patty could ask another question or request

to examine the old shoe, Jack who had paid no heed to the conversation, called impatiently:

"Come on, Pat, and decide what you want to eat. It will be late before we get back to Dalton."

The tearoom owner took the hint upon herself and hastened back to write down Jack's order. Apparently she had forgotten all about the wooden shoe.

"I'll take swiss steak with all the trimmings," Jack said.

"Bring me the same," Patty directed indifferently, her eyes still upon the fascinating wooden shoe.

"Do come and sit down," Jack pleaded when the woman had vanished into the kitchen. "You give me the jitters buzzing around like a fly."

Patty was too excited to be offended by his words.

"Did you see this old wooden shoe, Jack?" she asked in a half-whisper. "It looks exactly like the one stolen from Katrina's family."

The boy turned in his chair to regard the object. For a moment he too was startled, then he said in an off-hand tone:

"I imagine Katrina's shoe didn't have a flower growing in it. 'Course it couldn't be the same. You're on a clue-finding rampage today and everything looks like evidence to you!"

Patty ignored the remark. Stepping over to the window, she glanced quickly toward the kitchen to make certain that the tearoom owner was not in sight.

Then she lifted the wooden shoe and gazed at the underside.

"Jack! It is the same! The markings are here!"

The boy's chair made a rasping noise as he pushed it back. He came to peer over his sister's shoulder.

"There couldn't be two shoes with markings such as these!" Patty declared excitedly.

"It is queer, Pat." Jack's voice held a note of deep respect. "How do you suppose the shoe got here and what became of the money that was in it?"

"We must ask the tearoom owner without letting her suspect how anxious we are to learn about it."

"She may not tell us anything."

"She was ready to explain how the shoe came into her possession when you began yelling for your dinner. That appetite of yours!"

"I'm sorry, Pat, honestly I am. I thought you were just talking about plants."

"I don't believe the woman could be implicated in the theft," Patty said musingly. "If she suspected the shoe had been stolen, she'd not display it so openly in her front window."

"You're absolutely certain it is the Vandervort shoe?"

"Of course. I couldn't be mistaken."

"You have been before," her brother rejoined dryly. "For instance when you came back from Pelma you were fairly convinced that Carl Vandervort had stolen the money."

"I wasn't so sure of it, Jack. I did think he came to Pelma to learn about the shoe."

"Well, finding the wooden shoe here in Saxon City rather blasts all your theories, Patty."

"It may alter some of them. Jack, we must find out everything about this shoe, and what's more, we can't go back home without it!"

"The tearoom owner may not want to give it up."

"You must buy it from her if necessary, Jack. Offer her anything."

"My total wealth happens to be two dollars, Pat."

"We *can't* go back without the wooden shoe!" Patty declared firmly. "You have to help me get it, Jack."

Mrs. Harrison, the tearoom owner, now came into the dining room bearing a tray of steaming hot food. Patty replaced the wooden shoe on the window ledge with an attempt at unconcern.

"I am sorry to be slow," Mrs. Harrison apologized, setting down her tray. "I let my girls go at seven o'clock, and it keeps me busy looking after everything myself."

"We're in no hurry," Patty assured her with a warm smile. "I was just showing my brother the wooden shoe."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Harrison murmured absently.

"You suggested a moment ago that it came into your possession in a strange way," Patty prompted eagerly.

"I found the shoe. Last week my sister and I attended the festival at Pelma."

Patty looked quickly at her brother, for this bit of information tended to confirm her belief that the wooden shoe had come from the Vandervort home.

"It was an odd thing," Mrs. Harrison continued. "We were walking along one of the narrow side streets when I noticed something lying in a deep ditch at the side of the road. It was this wooden shoe."

"There was nothing inside it?" Patty asked.

"Oh, no, just the empty shoe. But I thought it would make a nice souvenir of the festival, so I brought it home with me. After the mud was washed off, it made a nice flower pot."

"It is very attractive," Patty murmured. "I don't wonder you liked it."

A sharp pain in his shins warned Jack that it was his turn to speak.

"You wouldn't want to sell the shoe?" he questioned, trying to speak casually.

"Sell it? Oh, no, I'd never consider that."

Patty and Jack exchanged a baffled glance, but before they could say anything more, Mrs. Harrison hurried away to wait upon two customers who had just entered the cafe.

"Jack, I simply must have that shoe," Patty declared in a whisper. "If necessary we'll tell her everything about the robbery."

They began their dinner, but Patty ate sparingly, her gaze resting on the plants in the window. She was plagued by a silly fear that the wooden shoe might disappear before her eyes. Even now it was difficult to comprehend the good fortune which had brought her to Saxon City and this particular tearoom.

"I figure it out this way," she remarked to her brother. "The thief, whoever he was, stole the wooden shoe from the Vandervort home, but fearing to be caught with such conspicuous evidence, removed the money and threw the shoe away."

"Then Katrina's money is definitely gone. Unless the bills were marked, there will be no way to identify them."

"I'm afraid you're right, Jack. But even if the money can't be recovered, I'd enjoy seeing the culprit brought to justice."

"In the light of this new discovery, do you still think Carl Vandervort figures in the affair?"

"That's the part I can't puzzle out," Patty admitted with a frown. "By his own admission he was interested in the wooden shoe, and the excerpt from his letter tended to further condemn him. However, I could never understand why he would be interested in the Vandervort's money."

"Possibly he was after the code markings on the underside of the shoe."

"That's what I assumed too, Jack. But if Carl Van-

dervort took the shoe for that purpose, wouldn't he have kept it in his possession?"

"Perhaps not, Pat. He knew he was under suspicion and may have feared someone would try to examine his luggage. He could have made a copy of the markings and discarded the shoe."

"That's possible, of course," Patty nodded. "It seems to me that one of the strangest things is why no one has ever solved the old Hans Vandervort code. It looks as if someone could do it."

"You might try," Jack said with a grin. "But first you'll have to acquire the wooden shoe."

The pair deliberately loitered over their dinners, waiting for the other couple to leave the dining room. When at last they were alone, Patty approached Mrs. Harrison again, and this time told her about the recent robbery at the Vandervort home.

At first the tearoom owner looked incredulous, and finally alarmed, as it dawned upon her that she might be regarded with suspicion for having the wooden shoe in her possession.

"I am sure no one will blame you," Patty smiled. "But you can understand why I wish to have the shoe. I'd like to return it to my friend, Katrina Vandervort."

"You are absolutely certain it is the same shoe?"

"I don't see how I could mistake the markings on the underside."

"I noticed them myself," Mrs. Harrison admitted, "but I imagined they had been put on by the manufacturer."

"The shoe is carved by hand," Patty explained. "The marking was the work of Hans Vandervort."

Mrs. Harrison became very much interested and went to examine the wooden shoe again. She asked the significance of the strange symbols, but Patty could say truthfully that she did not know.

"By all means take the shoe," the woman urged. "I'll remove the geranium. It isn't worth saving anyway."

She upset the shoe, giving it a sharp rap which made the soil and the flower fall out. Then she washed the container under the kitchen tap, and brought it back to Patty neatly wrapped in paper.

The girl thanked her, and after Jack had settled for their dinners, they left the cafe. Patty fairly danced back to the car, carrying her package as carefully as if it were glass.

When they were in the car, she could not resist an impulse to tear off the paper and look again at the curious markings.

"Drive home as fast as you can, Jack," Patty urged, her eyes bright with anticipation. "Tomorrow I must send the wooden shoe to Katrina, but tonight it's mine and I mean to have at least one try at that old code!"

CHAPTER XV

THE VANDERVORT CODE

IT WAS after nine o'clock when the young people finally reached Dalton. Since it occurred to Patty that in a matter as bewildering as the Hans Vandervort code, four minds would be better than one, she immediately enlisted the aid of her mother, father and Jack in trying to puzzle it out.

With pencil and paper, they all sat about the dining room table, the wooden shoe serving as a unique centerpiece. Mrs. Saunders soon gave up, declaring that she could not make head nor tail of the strange jumble of marks and letters. Jack worked nearly an hour, using up pages of paper. Presently he went to bed, leaving only Patty and her father still absorbed in the problem.

"I've been working Jack's knotty algebra problems," Mr. Saunders frowned. "It seems as if I could make something of this."

At midnight however, he suddenly threw down his pencil.

"We're only wasting our time, Patty. It's late and we ought to go to bed."

"Oh, Dad, I had hoped we could puzzle it out together."

"I don't think we have a chance, Patty. Hans Vandervort was a Hollander, wasn't he?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then it's fairly evident the code would be in Dutch instead of English. In other words we'd have to decipher it first in Dutch and then translate to English, which is impossible for us because we only know English."

"I never thought of that," Patty admitted ruefully.

"Greater minds than ours have failed at this task. It's an assignment for an expert, a man who has spent his life working out cryptograms and ciphers."

"Are there really persons who make a living at that sort of thing?" Patty asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes, although only a relatively few are mentally equipped for such work. It takes a peculiar type of mind—not to mention years of experience."

"I can well believe that."

"The government employs men who are very clever at solving codes. During time of war they have an important work to do."

"I wish I could send this wooden shoe in to Washington, Dad."

"Come to think of it, Patty, there's a man right here in Dalton who makes a hobby of codes. George Gershin."

"Why, isn't he a lawyer, Dad?"

"Yes, and a very clever one. But I've been told he has made a special hobby of cryptography."

"Do you think he would look at this code, Dad?"

"I really couldn't say, but it would do no harm to ask him. His office is directly across the street from mine in the Leader Building."

Early the next morning Patty wrapped up the wooden shoe to shield it from the curious gaze of pedestrians, and set forth to interview Mr. Gershin. An elevator shot her up to the third floor of the Leader Building, but upon reaching the glass door which bore the man's name, she hesitated a long while before summoning courage to enter.

Patty had thought that by coming early to the office she would arrive before any of Mr. Gershin's clients. However, the little reception room was fairly crowded, and the stern-faced woman with spectacles who was typing notes, left her desk to find an extra chair.

"Do you have an appointment with Mr. Gershin?" she asked Patty.

"No, I haven't," the girl stammered. "I didn't know I was supposed to have one."

"I am afraid you must wait. There are several others ahead of you."

Patty sank into the vacant chair feeling very ill at ease. Just then the outside door opened, and a tall,

nervous-appearing man entered. With a curt nod to his secretary he walked into the room marked "Private."

Patty began to regret that she had come at all, for Mr. Gershin's stern face warned her that he would take scant interest in such an insignificant object as a wooden shoe. She waited a half hour while clients filed in and out of the office. Soon it would be her turn. She wished that she could think of a logical excuse for retreating.

Just at that moment when her courage was at its lowest ebb, an elderly couple emerged from the lawyer's private office, and the secretary nodded to Patty, indicating that she could enter next.

Mr. Gershin was busy writing at his desk and did not glance up until Patty had taken the vacant chair directly in front of him.

"What can I do for you?" he inquired brusquely. A suggestion of a frown puckered his eyebrows, as if he were annoyed because a mere girl ventured to claim any of his valuable time.

"I have been told that you are an expert cryptologist," Patty stammered.

"I shouldn't venture to call myself an expert," the lawyer returned, relaxing somewhat. "I do like to dabble with codes and ciphers."

"I have something here I'd like to have you see, if

you can spare the time," Patty said, fumbling with the wrappings of the wooden shoe.

The lawyer smiled tolerantly "Only difficult codes interest me," he explained. "But let's see what you have."

Patty silently placed the wooden shoe in his hands, indicating the curious markings. Mr. Gershin stared at it a moment, and his attitude underwent a sudden change. Warmth came into his smile.

"Why, I believe you have something here!" he exclaimed. "Let me study it for a minute."

Patty was entirely content to sit quietly in her chair while the lawyer poured over the markings. He remained oblivious to his young visitor for at least ten minutes, then he glanced up again.

"This is no ordinary code which can be solved with a few hours work."

"You mean it can't be puzzled out by anyone?"

"I can best answer your question with a quotation from Poe," Mr. Gershin replied. "It may be roundly asserted that human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve."

"Well, that sounds encouraging," Patty smiled. "I had almost given up hope."

"If you wish I'll see what I can do with this," Mr. Gershin offered.

"Will it cost very much?" Patty asked timidly.

"Not a cent. I dabble at this sort of thing for the fun of it rather than the profit. Mind, I can't promise I'll be able to solve the code, but I'll do my best."

Patty thanked the man profusely for his kindness, reflecting that one could not always judge a person by external appearances. She had been so certain that Mr. Gershin was stern and cold but now she knew his aloof countenance disguised a kindly personality.

The lawyer asked a number of questions regarding the wooden shoe. Patty supplied all the facts in her possession, stressing that Hans Vandervort originally had come from Holland.

"I am glad you mentioned that," Mr. Gershin nodded. "Very likely the code involves Dutch which will make it harder to solve. The approximate date of the man's possession of the shoe likewise is important, for there were vogues in ciphers and codes, you know."

The lawyer then launched enthusiastically into his favorite subject, the early history of ciphers and codes.

"One of the oldest and yet the simplest cipher which was used in military operations is the Julius Caesar," he explained. "Each letter of the alphabet is represented by another letter, several spaces preceding or following the original letter. B would equal A, C would equal B, and so forth. You follow me?"

"I think so," Patty gasped, her head in a whirl. "But if that is a simple code, it's no wonder I couldn't figure out a more complicated one."

Just then the telephone rang and Mr. Gershin answered it. When he turned back to Patty again he seemed to have dismissed all thought of codes and ciphers from his mind, and it was evident that he considered the interview ended.

"Leave your name with my secretary please," he requested in a business like tone. "Also your telephone number. If I have any success with this Vandervort code I'll call you within a few days."

After obeying Mr. Gershin's instructions, Patty crossed the street to her father's office building, there to report the success of the interview.

"If Mr. Gershin can't solve the code then I'm convinced no solution ever will be found," she declared. "Oh, Dad, wouldn't it be exciting if I should be the person to learn where the Beauvis tapestries are hidden?"

"Don't build up your hopes, Patty Rose," her father warned. "In the first place, the code isn't solved. Even if the original hiding place should be discovered, it's far from likely the tapestries would still be there. Certainly not in an undamaged condition."

"I never thought about that," Patty admitted slightly crestfallen. "Are tapestries ruined by age?"

"Not if properly cared for, but I should think they might easily be ruined if not stored in the right manner."

"I guess it's silly of me to speculate upon finding them," Patty said ruefully. "But it would be fun even to locate the place where once they were hidden."

"Have you heard anything more from the police department at Saxon City?" her father inquired teasingly.

"No, and that brings me to the point of this visit. May I borrow the car for half an hour?"

"Oh, I guess so," Mr. Saunders consented. "Drive carefully, won't you?"

Patty nodded absently for her father always gave her the same admonition. While she handled an automobile well, he never liked to have either her or Jack take it alone.

Patty was quick to snatch up the keys which Mr. Saunders tossed over to her, and left the office hurriedly lest he change his mind. She found the car parked on the street and drove directly to the Baker home. Gladys was not there, so deciding that she could not wait, Patty continued toward the Brighton farm. It was her intention to investigate again the woods where she had observed the two strangers burying their mysterious box, on the night of Mrs. Harborg's treasure-hunt party.

As Patty drew up by the roadside, she observed that another automobile, a black sedan, had been

parked nearby. Upon entering the woods she was startled to hear voices.

For just a moment it occurred to her that the two strangers might have returned. But as she moved noiselessly forward, she glimpsed three men who seemed to be examining the ground in the glen. Patty recognized one of them as the detective with whom she had talked at Saxon City.

"The police probably came here to look for evidence," she thought. "My idea of trying to find heel prints which would tie up with the one left in Mr. Rainey's flower box doesn't seem to be so original."

As a stick crackled underfoot, the detectives straightened up to listen intently, their hands upon their revolvers. Patty lost no time in emerging from among the trees.

"Oh, it's you!" exclaimed the man whom she had met at Saxon City. "Come here and I'll show you something."

Patty slipped and skidded down the steep bank. She saw then that the officers had found what she had hoped to discover herself, a clearly defined footprint. With a spade they had removed a large square of earth and were carefully preparing it for its journey back to the police station.

"Why, it looks the same as that print in the flower box!" Patty cried. "The peculiar marking of the heel is identical."

"We'll take careful measurements when we return to Saxon City," the detective told her, "but offhand I'd agree with you. It looks as if Darrell Jennings has been mixed up in a business more serious than petty theft."

As Patty walked back to the road with the three men she asked if any clue had been gleaned as to the present whereabouts of the pickpocket.

"So far we've not been able to trace him," the detective replied. "But evidence is piling up. We'll get him sooner or later."

"I suppose this idea sounds ridiculous," Patty said apologetically, "but I've thought almost from the first that the Vandervort home, the Rainey residence and the Elias Parkson were all marked for burglary. The Vandervorts were robbed, then the Raineys, and now wouldn't it be logical that Mr. Parkson might be next?"

"Your reasoning is sound," the detective replied with a tolerant smile. "Plainclothesmen are now keeping watch of the Parkson residence. However, we think Darrell Jennings and his companion will be too smart to walk into such an obvious trap."

"You seem to have worked out every angle of the case," Patty admitted ruefully. "My ideas always seem to come late."

Parting company with the detectives, she drove

slowly back to Dalton, and after leaving the car for her father, walked home.

The mailman had just left the house, and Patty saw several letters peeping from the box. One was for her, and her heart leaped as she saw that it was addressed in Katrina Vandervort's hand. She ran with it to her room, there to consume its contents in private.

After an introductory paragraph which Patty skimmed over, she came to an item worthy of more than one reading. Katrina wrote:

"I know that it must bore you to receive only discouraging news from Pelma, but in truth, we are able to think of little else but our immediate troubles. Friday our beloved ancestral home is to be sold by the sheriff, and besides losing it we feel the disgrace of a forced sale.

"I blame Carl Vandervort for everything. The man has the amazing affrontry to remain in Pelma, and from a friend of mine who works at the Inn I have positive evidence that he stole our money. I have no patience with Father for refusing to permit his arrest."

The letter was a lengthy one, but after hurrying through the remainder of it, Patty went back to the item which concerned Carl Vandervort.

"What new evidence could Katrina have gathered?" she thought. "Everything I've learned the past few

days tends to prove that Carl couldn't have been quite as black as we believed him to be."

The letter left Patty thoroughly disheartened. Even though she had found the discarded wooden shoe, she realized her inability to aid Katrina's family in the present situation. The old Vandervort home would be sold on Friday. It was now Thursday for Katrina had delayed in mailing her letter.

"There's just no hope that the money will be recovered, I fear," she thought. "The best one may expect is that the police will capture the persons responsible for the theft."

Patty carried Katrina's letter to her mother, mentioning that she would like to attend the auction sale the following day.

"To bid in the house?" Jack, who was standing nearby, asked with a grin. "How much do you suppose that old wreck will sell for?"

"It's not a wreck!" Patty retorted. "The house could be fixed up so that it would be nice again. It's a shame Katrina and her parents must lose it, for they're deeply attached to the place."

"Of course it is," Mrs. Saunders agreed. "We might be able to drive over to Pelma tomorrow only I wonder if it is the thing to do? It might seem almost as if we went through curiosity." Soft distress moved across Mrs. Saundier's kindly features.

"Katrina would never think that. And I'd like to

take her the wooden shoe. Of course I may not be able to get it back in time."

"Get it back?" Jack inquired alertly, for he did not know of his sister's visit to the offices of Mr. Gershin.

Patty did not explain for just at that moment the front doorbell rang. It was only a peddler, but when she returned to the kitchen, Jack had gone.

"It might be just as well to drive over to Pelma next week instead of tomorrow," Mrs. Saunders suggested, resuming the conversation where it had been interrupted. "Perhaps then you could invite Katrina to come back with you for a few weeks."

Patty brightened at this prospect and said no more about wishing to attend the sale although her desire was by no means deadened. By dinner time, however, her former gloom had returned, and she was so quiet at the table that Mrs. Saunders commented upon it.

"Don't you feel well, Patty?" she inquired anxiously.
"I'm just not hungry, Mother."

"I fear you take Katrina's troubles too seriously, dear. I really wish we never had allowed you to attend the Dutch Festival. You've not been yourself since your visit to Pelma."

The telephone rang and Jack, feeling certain that the call was for him, hastened to answer. He returned a moment later to say that it was Patty who was wanted.

"One of your boy friends," he said teasingly. "A fellow by the name of Gershin."

Patty's startled eyes met those of her father's. She sprang up so quickly that her chair went over backwards, clattering on the floor before she could rescue it.

"Patty!" her mother reprimanded.

The girl did not even hear the reprimand.

"I never expected Mr. Gershin would call me so soon!" she exclaimed gaily. "It must mean he's solved the wooden shoe code!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAIL-FENCE CIPHER

PATTY's hand trembled ever so slightly as she took the telephone receiver from the table where Jack had let it fall. Her excitement did not subside when she heard the voice of the lawyer.

"This is Mr. Gershin speaking," he said clearly. "I believe I have some good news for you."

"The code is solved?" Patty asked eagerly.

"At least part of it. I have resolved the markings and letters on the wooden shoe into three words. The last two have definite meaning. The first word however seems to be more or less an orphan."

"Oh, I'm very grateful to you for your work, Mr. Gershin. I feel deeply indebted."

"Not at all, not at all. Your problem gave me a very enjoyable few hours, and introduced me to a cipher which was decidedly unusual. In fact, I'm not completely satisfied that it is all worked out yet."

"I'm very anxious to learn the result, Mr. Gershin."

"I could tell you the words over the 'phone, but I should prefer to give it to you verbally. Then I could show you how I worked it out."

"May I come to your office early tomorrow morning?"

"I should be very glad to receive you there," Mr. Gershin replied formally, "but I shall be out of the city on legal business. I expect to return in three or four days. If you will call me then I shall be ready for you."

Patty's heart sank for she realized how imperative was the need for immediate action if anything were to be done for Katrina. The old Vandervort home-stead would be sold the following day. While she scarcely dared hope that the solution of the wooden shoe code would result in the recovery of the Beauvis tapestries, there was an outside chance that it might.

"Couldn't I see you tonight at your home?" Patty asked. "The solution of the cipher is very important to a friend of mine, and a delay of three or four days would destroy what little chance she has."

"That will be agreeable to me," Mr. Gershin replied. "You may come to my home this evening if you wish. However, I must catch an early plane in the morning, so kindly arrive at your earliest convenience."

Patty hung up the receiver and sat for a moment trying to collect her thoughts. She was brought around sharply by a remark from Jack who had heard part of the conversation and by this time knew that Mr. Gershin was a gentleman of importance.

"Say, Pat! Who is that fellow anyway? What busi-

ness is so pressing that you are going to his residence tonight?"

"Mr. Gershin has solved the inscription on the wooden shoe, Jack. He is leaving town tomorrow so that's why I must see him immediately. You'll take me in the car, won't you?"

Jack had intended to spend the evening with a young friend who was engaged in the intricate business of making an ancient flivver run again. But he quickly abandoned his plans for he too was deeply interested in the strange inscription on the wooden shoe.

Before Patty herself was ready to leave, he had backed the car out of the garage and was vibrating the atmosphere with impatient little staccato honkings of the horn.

"I'm com—ing!" Patty called as she gave her hat a final twist before the hall mirror, reflecting the while upon the perverse ways of brothers. They were always too early or too late.

However, she had forgotten her irritation by the time their modest coupe rolled up the driveway of the stately Gershin home.

"Say, this is a pretty doggy place," Jack observed as he opened the car door for Patty to alight. "I think maybe I'll be a lawyer instead of a mechanical engineer!"

"Or a garage mechanic!" Patty added maliciously.

They rang the doorbell and a moment later were admitted by a liveried servant. Jack fumbled his hat awkwardly until relieved of it, but Patty was not in the least self conscious although she too felt awed by the luxurious interior of the home.

"Mr. Gershin is expecting us," she told the servant.

"Yes, Miss, he is waiting in the library. This way, please."

They were led down a long reception hall thickly padded with carpet, through the living room to a small, less pretentious den in the south wing of the house. Mr. Gershin sat reading at his desk, while behind him the walls were lined solidly with ponderous looking volumes.

He arose immediately, greeting Patty cordially, and shaking hands with Jack when he was introduced. After the girl and boy had accepted chairs, he went back to his desk, removing the Vandervort wooden shoe from one of the locked drawers.

"I have solved many ciphers," he remarked with a smile, "but this is the first time I ever encountered one written upon such a curious object as a wooden shoe."

"Did it take you long to solve the code?" Patty questioned.

"No, it was not as difficult as I anticipated. In fact, I struck upon a clue almost at once which made the solution fairly simple."

Picking up the shoe and turning it over, he indicated the markings which had puzzled Patty and her friends.

"You noticed these, I imagine?"

"Oh, yes, but I had no idea as to their significance."

"In a way they have none—that is they do not actually figure in the solution, save as they suggest to one skilled in this type of work that a variation of the old rail-fence cipher might have been used."

"I don't understand," Patty said blankly.

"I'll try to show you what I mean by a simple example. The rail-fence transposition cipher was used by the Union forces during the civil war. For instance, imagine that the simple message, "enemy advancing," was to be transmitted through the lines. It would first be written thus:

e e y d a c n
n m a v n i g

"I suppose it gets its name from the fact that if lines are drawn from e to n and n to e and so on, the appearance is that of a rail fence?" Patty asked with interest.

"Exactly."

"I should think a message like that could be figured out easily," Jack commented.

"It is not sent in such an obvious form," Mr. Ger-shin explained. "Now take our simple example,

'enemy advancing,' after breaking it up into the rail-fence arrangement we have two words: eeydaen and nmavnig. These are the words which are transmitted."

"And you say that the Vandervort cipher is of this character?" Patty questioned eagerly.

"Yes, the message when broken into the rail-fence reads thus:

't p e r t d e
a s c e e b d'

"Why, that scarcely makes sense when unscrambled into words," Patty cried.

"If my work is correct, and I believe it is, you have this message after drawing imaginary lines between t and a, and a and p, as well as between the other letters in the code:

'Tap Secreted Bed.'

"That doesn't seem to mean anything," Jack said in disappointment.

"I am somewhat puzzled myself," Mr. Gershin admitted. "This seems to me to be a fragment of a cipher rather than one which is complete."

"I believe I know the meaning!" Patty exclaimed. "'Tap' must be an abbreviation for tapestry. The Vandervort tapestries were hidden in a bed!"

"Even for a small tapestry I should not think that a bed would make a very safe hiding place," Mr. Gershin replied.

"The Vandervorts still have the old family bedstead," Patty went on. "I saw for myself that it had a cavity in one of the massive posts."

"Large enough to hold a tapestry?" the lawyer inquired.

"Well, no," Patty admitted. "Only a small object could have been hidden there. Anyway, it was empty."

"A tapestry might have been secreted underneath the bed," Jack contributed.

"It would not have remained long in such a conspicuous place," Mr. Gershin said with a smile. "No, the person who was clever enough to think up this cipher, would never hide valuables anywhere so obvious—you may be sure of that."

"A bed seems such a silly hiding place," Patty declared with a puzzled frown. "Where else could one hide a Beauvis tapestry except possibly in a mattress?"

Mr. Gershin's eyebrows lifted. "Did I understand you to say a Beauvis tapestry? There are none in existence today except in museums."

"The man who owned this wooden shoe was a distinguished collector," Patty explained. "As I understand it he owned several Beauvis tapestries, but they were so well hidden that no one has ever been able to find them. The cipher on this wooden shoe offers the only clue."

"The Beauvis tapestries, at least all of which I have

any knowledge, were very large," the lawyer said thoughtfully. "They were not bulky, understand, for they were of silk, but they were meant to cover a large wall space. I had the privilege of examining several in France last year. One could not have hung them in this room for the ceiling is too low."

"I had no idea that they were that large," Patty returned in amazement. "It is difficult to imagine them hidden anywhere in a bed."

"There may have been smaller Beauvis tapestries, but not to my knowledge. However, I do not consider myself an authority upon the subject."

"I am afraid that as far as the Vandervort family is concerned, the tapestries are gone," Patty admitted as she picked up the wooden shoe and the paper upon which Mr. Gershin had written the solution of the cipher. "However, that fact does not lessen my gratitude for your work. Can't I offer some recompense?"

"I have received it already," the lawyer returned. "It was a genuine pleasure to test my skill. I only regret that I could not have had the complete cipher."

Patty glanced at him quickly. "There is more to it you think?"

"Yes, that would be my opinion. I am not confident that the word 'tap' is an abbreviation for tapestry, notwithstanding that the history of the wooden shoe would tend to substantiate such a belief," he responded gravely.

"But what could have become of the other part of the cipher?" Patty asked.

Mr. Gershin shrugged. "Who knows? Hans Vandervort was a very clever man."

Patty turned the wooden shoe over in her hand, examining it again. "Some of the code couldn't have been removed?"

"No, I examined the shoe very carefully under a magnifying glass. The message as it appears there has never been altered. Perhaps it is just one of those mysteries which will never be fully explained."

Mr. Gershin arose from his chair, and Patty and Jack quickly did likewise, realizing that their host had given them over an hour of his time. He walked with them to the door, telling Patty that if ever she came upon another puzzling code she should bring it to him.

"Well, it looks as if everything is solved, only you don't know anything more about where the tapestries are now than you did before!" Jack chuckled as he started the car.

"At least I've made a big step forward," his sister replied. "Don't be too sure I'll not find those old tapestries!"

"Just how, Pat?"

"I'll take this wooden shoe back to Pelma tomorrow," Patty announced with a determined tilt of her chin. "The translation means little to you or me, but for Katrina it may have a special significance."

CHAPTER XVII

A FINAL SEARCH

MR. AND MRS. SAUNDERS did not oppose their daughter's wish to consult immediately with Katrina. They scarcely shared her hope that the Vandervort girl could provide additional information which would throw new light upon the wooden shoe code, but they knew the trip meant everything to Patty.

Jack did not wish to go for he played third base on the Dalton baseball team which was having an important game in a nearby town, but Patty and her parents were abroad before dawn. After a hastily snatched breakfast, they set off for Pelma. The road was practically deserted and nine o'clock found the party driving into the sleepy little village.

All traces of the recent celebration had been removed. The streets were neat and clean once more, and the few inhabitants who were visible seemed to have slipped back to a slower tempo of life.

Mr. and Mrs. Saunders dropped Patty off at the Vandervort home, but they did not wish to go inside, fearing that it was not the proper time to inflict themselves upon Katrina and her family.

"If the sale is being held today, they doubtlessly are in no mood to entertain visitors," Mrs. Saunders declared. "Your father and I will drive about town, Patty, and then we will wait for you at the Inn."

"If you go there you might examine the register to see if Carl Vandervort is still in Pelma," Patty suggested.

"No, I don't wish to do that," Mrs. Saunders replied. "After all, it is none of my affair."

As the Saunders car moved away, the door of the Vandervort cottage was flung open, and Katrina came running out. For an instant Patty did not recognize the girl for she no longer wore the festive Dutch costume. She was dressed in a crisp brown and yellow linen which emphasized the flaxen hue of her braids.

It was Katrina's face which seemed to have altered even more than her apparel. She was thinner than when Patty last had seen her, there were hollow places in her cheeks and dark circles under her listless eyes. However, as Katrina joyfully greeted her friend, the old sparkle came back for a moment and her hand-clasp was a firm one.

"Oh, Patty Rose, how glad I am to see you again. You came for the sale I suppose?"

"No, I came solely to talk with you, Katrina. I've brought back your wooden shoe."

For a moment Katrina could only stare. "You have recovered our money?" she gasped.

Patty shook her head regretfully. "I've found only the shoe, but the code is solved!"

"Oh, Patty! How did you do it? Tell me everything!"

She fairly pulled the girl into the house, calling to her mother and father who were not in the living room.

"Patty Rose is here!" she shouted. "She has found our wooden shoe and the strange markings are all explained!"

Mrs. Vandervort came hurriedly down the stairway, her eyes puffy and swollen from recent tears. Mr. Vandervort who had been sitting quietly in another room, arose to murmur a polite message of greeting. He did not seem to have comprehended about the wooden shoe, for it was not until Patty unwrapped her parcel that he paid the slightest heed to it.

When she displayed the paper Mr. Gershin had provided, the entire family grew excited.

"*'Tap Secreted Bed'*," Katrina repeated thoughtfully when its significance had been made known to her. "That must mean that the Beauvis tapestries were hidden in or near some bed—perhaps the one inherited from Hans Vandervort!"

"That was my theory," Patty nodded. "But where in a bed could tapestries be secreted? You don't have the original mattress?"

"Yes, we do!" Mrs. Vandervort exclaimed. "It is

upstairs in the attic. We have never used it but I did not like to throw away such a good mattress."

"Perhaps the tapestries are hidden inside it!" Patty intimated.

The suggestion was sufficient to turn everyone to the attic. The old Hans Vandervort mattress had been carefully packed away in a large wooden box, but Katrina's father soon had it out. With a sharp knife he opened one end of the heavy ticking and ran his arm deep into the soft filling.

"Can you feel anything, Father?" Katrina questioned hopefully.

"Nothing."

Mrs. Vandervort went to the kitchen for a broom, and using its long handle, she was able to probe every foot of the mattress stuffing.

"Nothing is hidden here," she said in a discouraged voice.

"We've ruined the mattress to no purpose," Patty admitted, crestfallen. "It was all my fault, but I thought—"

"No, no, you must not blame yourself," Mrs. Vandervort interrupted. "We owe you so much, and the mattress is not hurt. I can easily sew it again."

Next the four went to the spare bedroom to examine the old bedstead itself, but no one had the slightest hope that it would give up any treasure. Save for the hollow post they could find no hiding place.

"Of course we have no proof that it was this particular bed which Hans Vandervort meant," Patty said thoughtfully.

"We own only this one which came from the old house," Katrina replied. "The other beds were not very choice and were sold or given away."

"The search is quite useless, I fear," Mrs. Vandervort said with a weary sigh. "We may as well resign ourselves to the knowledge that the tapestries are lost."

Presently she and Mr. Vandervort went downstairs, leaving the girls alone in the bedroom.

"Mother is not herself today," Katrina said apologetically. "Losing the old house has been a severe blow to her."

"It is to be sold today, Katrina?"

"Yes, at one o'clock. Father does not hope that the property will bring more than five hundred dollars. It will leave us nothing after taxes and the mortgage are paid. Our own cottage will be the next to go upon the auction block."

"Surely not, Katrina. Your fortunes will change."

"I do not look for any good luck," Katrina returned bitterly. "We have had none since the day our wooden shoe was stolen. If Father had only a little money he could develop his bulb business and do well again. As it is, the future looks very black indeed."

Katrina walked to the bedroom window, staring across the garden toward the old Hans Vandervort

homestead. Boarding had been removed from the windows and the doors were open. A few men could be seen moving about the premises, examining the exterior of the house.

"Father thinks a contractor from another town may buy the place as cheaply as possible and tear it down for the lumber and brick."

"Oh, Katrina, that would be a pity."

"I would prefer to see such a thing happen than to have the house fall into the hands of Carl Vanderwort!"

Patty glanced quickly at Katrina for the remark was a surprising one.

"Surely he isn't interested in the house? You don't think he would buy it?"

"I have no idea what that man will do," Katrina replied, her eyes flashing. "I only know that since the house has been open he has been inspecting it from top to bottom."

"He may be interested in finding the tapestries!"

Katrina laughed ruefully. "Carl is interested in acquiring anything of ours which has a money value. He is the most grasping, selfish man I have ever met and I am ashamed to call him a kinsman. If it were not for Father I should have him arrested."

"You still believe that it was he who took the wooden shoe?"

"Certainly I do, Patty. When he left our home after

Father ordered him away, he must have disposed of the shoe. And besides that Juliana Van Alsteen tells me that he has acted most suspiciously at the Inn."

"Who is Juliana?" Patty inquired.

"She is employed at the Inn where Carl has his room. Juliana is a very good friend of mine."

"What did Juliana tell you, Katrina?"

"Among other things that when Carl first returned to the hotel he had a curious parcel in his luggage. He left it lying on a chair, and Juliana who was dusting the room, started to pick it up. He berated her shamefully."

"Such action shows that the man has a dreadful temper, but I don't see—"

"The package was the exact shape of a wooden shoe!"

"But Katrina," Patty protested, "you said only a moment ago that it was your theory Carl discarded the shoe when he left your home, thus explaining how it was picked up by Mrs. Harrison and later returned to me. If Carl had thrown away the shoe, he couldn't have it in his hotel room."

"I don't know when he threw it in the ditch," Katrina said with a frown. "I was only guessing at that part. Perhaps he kept it several days and then disposed of it," she added, quiet anger swaying her voice again.

Patty shook her head as if she could not agree with such a theory. However, she refrained from pur-

suing the matter, knowing that Katrina would never change one whit in her belief.

She felt discouraged because her visit to Pelma had been entirely useless. Every clue had been exhausted in the search for the Beauvis tapestries, and now she could think of no excuse for prolonging her stay at the Vandervort home.

"It's getting on toward noon," Patty declared regretfully. "I must meet Mother and Father at the Inn."

Katrina did not seem to hear. She was gazing out the window again.

"There he is!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Every time I see that man I nearly explode with rage!"

Patty guessed that Katrina had sighted Carl Vandervort once more, but joined her friend at the window. She observed two men sitting on the front stoop of the old house, absorbed in sober conversation. The younger of the two was Carl Vandervort.

"He is talking with the contractor," Katrina declared excitedly. "It would not surprise me if they mean to buy the house together, keeping the bids low!"

Before Patty could reply, there came a call from the lower floor. Mrs. Vandervort wished to tell Katrina that she had a visitor.

"Juliana Van Alsteen is here, Katrina."

"Juliana!" the girl exclaimed, glancing quickly at Patty. "She is usually at work in the morning."

As the two went to the head of the stairs, a dark haired, stout girl came hurrying up. She was quite breathless and obviously laboring under great excitement.

"Katrinal!" she cried, without giving the other an opportunity to introduce Patty. "I have important news for you. I risked discharge by leaving my duties, but I knew you would wish to know at once."

"What have you learned?" Katrina demanded.

"Our suspicions about that man were right!"

"Carl Vandervort?"

"Yes, I have proof that he was the one who stole your money."

"I have always been certain of it," Katrina said feelingly. "Perhaps if the evidence is strong enough Father will listen to reason."

"There can be no question of the man's guilt," Juliana declared triumphantly. "Only an hour ago, when Carl Vandervort was gone from his room, I dared to open the curious package in his suitcase. I found—" she paused for dramatic emphasis. "—your wooden shoe!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AID FROM JULIANA

THE declaration left Katrina and Patty Rose fairly stunned, for with the Hans Vandervort wooden shoe already recovered, it could not also be in the possession of Carl. Yet Juliana Van Alsteen seemed very certain of the fact.

"You saw the wooden shoe only an hour ago?"
Katrina asked incredulously.

"Less time than that. Mr. Vandervort left the hotel a few minutes after ten. I was fairly certain he would not return soon for he deposited his keys at the desk. I shouldn't have done it I know—and I risk discharge—but I went directly to Mr. Vandervort's room to make the bed. I deliberately opened the parcel which he has taken such care to keep hidden. It contained your wooden shoe, Katrina."

"Not mine, Juliana. You must have been mistaken. The original shoe was returned to me this morning by my friend, Patty Saunders."

The hotel maid stared at the two girls incredulously.

"But Katrina," she protested, "I have seen the shoe here in your home many times. It must be the same!"

"I cannot understand it myself," Katrina replied

slowly, "but I do know that I have my own shoe back, although the money is gone. Wait! I will show you."

She darted downstairs to get the object which had been left in the living room. This gave Patty Rose an opportunity to speak alone with Juliana.

"Please tell me," she requested, "did Carl Vandervort's shoe have any markings, letters or the like on the underside?"

"Oh, I had no time to look. I was nervous lest the man return at any moment. When I saw that it was Katrina's shoe I wrapped up the parcel again and quickly went away."

"You didn't notice whether or not the shoe was intended for a left foot?"

"I didn't, no. I was too excited. I just thought it was the Vandervort shoe."

Before Patty could ask another question, Katrina came hurrying back upstairs. She displayed the wooden shoe which had been recovered from Mrs. Harrison.

"The one in Carl Vandervort's room was almost identical!" Juliana maintained. "They look enough alike to be mates."

"That's just what I think they are," Patty Rose said quietly.

"You believe there were two shoes and that Carl Vandervort has one of them?" Katrina gasped.

"What could be more logical?"

"I never heard of a mate to our shoe," Katrina said thoughtfully as she mulled over the theory. "But it's possible, Patty!"

"Mr. Gershin told me that he considered the wooden shoe code which he solved for us only a part of the original," Patty went on. "Could it be possible that in some manner Carl obtained the other portion of the cipher?"

"I never thought of that," Katrina gasped. "Where could he have obtained it?"

"Perhaps from old letters or papers handed down by his own ancestor, Carl Vandervort. I am only guessing. But we must see that shoe."

"How can we do it, Patty? He will never show it to us."

"No, I agree with you there. The only thing I can see to do is to go to the Inn while he is away and look at it."

"Without his knowledge? Patty, we wouldn't dare!"

"I'll do it, Katrina. If only I can get inside his room—"

"I have a pass key," Juliana declared. "But if the management ever learned I allowed anyone to enter a guest's room, I'd be discharged."

"I'll be very careful you may be sure," Patty promised gravely. "I'd not like to be caught myself."

"I'm going with you," Katrina said firmly. "It's not right that you take the risk alone, when you are only trying to help me."

"We have no time to lose," Patty warned, moving to the window again. "Carl is still down there in the yard but he may take it into his head to return to the Inn at any moment."

"He'll probably stay here until after the sale is over," Katrina replied. She glanced nervously at the ivory clock on the table. "We'll have a good hour."

The three girls quietly left the house, and while Mrs. Vandervort saw them go she was too buried in her grief to offer any comment.

"I'll have to take you into the Inn by the rear entrance," Juliana apologized. "I don't want anyone to learn that I was away."

The fat cook who was working by the stove did not even glance up as the girls entered the kitchen. They moved swiftly on to the hallway where Juliana paused to make certain that no one was in sight.

"Carl Vandervort's room is number 309," she informed in a whisper. "I don't dare go upstairs with you, but here is the key. Be careful."

"We shall," Patty promised grimly.

"I'll try to keep watch of the corridor for you," Juliana added hurriedly. "If anyone comes, I'll do my best to warn you. Remember, two knocks on the

door will mean you are to hide. Three will mean to leave as quickly as you can."

Patty nodded, and taking the key, she and Katrina walked up the three flights of stairs. A maid was visible at the far end of the corridor, so Katrina pretended to busy herself tying her shoe laces. When the young woman had gone inside one of the bed chambers, the girls quickly located room 309.

"I'm frightened half to death," Katrina whispered nervously. "If we're caught—"

Patty inserted the key in the lock and heard the tumblers turn. She opened the door and they went inside, closing it softly behind them.

In their haste the girls had forgotten to ask Juliana where to search for the wooden shoe. They experienced a moment of panic for they knew they did not have any time to waste. The room had not yet been cleaned and at any moment the maid down the corridor might come to dust and make the bed.

Patty counseled herself to remain calm. She went to the clothes closet and looked there for Carl Vandervort's suitcase. Katrina dropped down on her knees, searching under the bed.

"Here it is!" she murmured triumphantly. "The shoe must be inside."

They hauled out the suitcase, taking care to disturb nothing as they looked beneath the folds of clothing.

An awkward looking parcel was found in the very bottom layer.

"This must be the shoe!" Katrina cried. In her eagerness she tried to break the string.

"No! No!" Patty warned. "Untie it."

The knot had been pulled tight and Katrina was so nervous that she could not loosen it. She offered the package to Patty who soon had it open. Carl Vandervort's wooden shoe stood exposed.

"It is the mate to your shoe, Katrina!" Patty exclaimed. "See, this one is for a left foot while yours is for a right!"

"Look on the underside," Katrina urged, her voice unsteady. "I'm afraid to hope."

Patty flipped over the shoe and gave a little cry of exultation.

"The code is here, Katrina! And it must be complementary to the part we've already solved! We still have a chance to find the Beauvis tapestries!"

"A slim one I fear, Patty. If they were hidden in a bed—"

She broke off suddenly as a patter of footsteps was heard in the hall. Then came two staccato knocks on the door. The girls stood frozen, listening for the third rap. It did not come.

"Hide!" Patty whispered.

Already they could hear a heavy tread, tread, along the hall which warned them that someone approached.

There was no time to rewrap the wooden shoe. Patty slammed down the lid of the suitcase and pushed it back under the bed. Katrina still clutched the shoe as her friend jerked her into the closet and closed the door.

As they huddled together weak with fright, the girls were able to hear voices from the hallway.

"Shall I clean your room now, sir, or later?" they heard Juliana ask.

"She's trying to give us time to hide," Katrina whispered. "But it will do no good. We'll be caught."

"Hush!" Patty warned. "If we're quiet we may escape detection."

They lost all hope, however, as they recognized Carl Vandervort's voice. He said something in reply to Juliana and then opened the door and entered the room. He walked over to the window and slammed it down. Next he jerked open a bureau drawer, muttering angrily to himself as he searched for some object.

The girls waited tensely, certain that the man would open the closet door. Should he do so they would be exposed, for the few garments which hung from the center rod never would shield them from anyone's searching gaze.

The air in the closet was hot and stuffy. Katrina and Patty were afraid to move a muscle for fear of causing a loose board to creak beneath them. But the

physical discomfort which they suffered was as nothing compared to their mental anguish.

They believed it would be only a matter of moments until Carl Vandervort threw open the closet door and discovered them cringing there. To be caught with the wooden shoe in their possession! Why had they not taken time to replace it in the suitcase? Perhaps then they could have explained themselves out of the difficulty.

Carl Vandervort walked toward the closet but he did not open the door. The girls heard him mutter:

"Let me think, what did I do with that check book? Just when I need it!"

Patty summoned her courage and peered out through a small crack in the door. The man was working himself into a subdued state of rage. He emptied the contents of his pockets, and went through the bureau drawers once more. Papers taken from the desk were tossed on the floor.

At another time Patty might have been amused by such a display of temper, but now her situation was too precarious for any feeling of enjoyment. She gripped Katrina's hand as she saw Carl walk over toward the bed. He jerked out the suitcase.

Patty's heart descended in a final tailspin for she knew that should the man examine the contents of his luggage, he would be sure to notice that the wooden shoe was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOCKED ROOM

As PATTY anxiously watched, Carl Vandervort lifted out an old gray suit from the bag, and in searching the pockets came upon the missing checkbook. Without bothering to look further, he pocketed the item, and shoved the suitcase back under the bed. Patty breathed normally again for he had failed to observe that the wooden shoe was missing.

With an impatient glance at his watch, the man went out the door, and the girls heard the key turn in the lock. They waited several minutes before emerging from the closet.

"That was a narrow escape," Patty declared in relief. "I feel as weak as a rag."

"So do I," Katrina agreed. "Let's go before something else happens."

With the wooden shoe in their possession the girls darted to the door. Katrina turned the knob but it would not open. She gazed at Patty with startled eyes.

"We're locked in!"

"We have Juliana's pass key. Where is it, Katrina?"

"Why, I thought you had it, Patty."

"Well, I seem to have misplaced it. Now we *are* in a nice situation for without a key Juliana won't be able to let us out of here either."

As the girls searched frantically, they heard footsteps in the hall and then a light tap on the door.

"Hurry!" Juliana warned in a low tone. "The maid will soon be ready to do this room."

"We've lost the key and we're locked in," Katrina told her through the door panel.

Patty looked in the closet, under the bed, and on the floor. She was becoming panic stricken when suddenly she espied the missing key lying in plain sight on the desk.

"It's a miracle Carl didn't find it there!" she thought. "He must have gazed right at it more than once!"

Patty quickly unlocked the door, and the girls slipped out into the hall where Juliana anxiously awaited them.

"I thought surely we'd all be caught," she declared excitedly. "When I saw Carl Vandervort coming up the hall I didn't know what to do."

"You warned us just in time, Juliana," Patty praised her warmly.

"Did you get the shoe?"

"Yes, and we think it is the right one. We owe you a great deal, Juliana."

"Oh, no! I only hope no one discovers what I have done. You'll never tell?"

"Rather not," Patty chuckled. "We'll take good care to keep this escapade dark."

Juliana locked the door from the outside and hurriedly escorted the girls to the rear stairway. No one paid particular attention to them as they left the Inn.

"Now let's have a look at the wooden shoe," Patty suggested when they were on the street. "Where can we go?"

The public square was close by and looked deserted. Patty and Katrina sat down at a bench near the bridge. The few pedestrians who passed paid no heed to the girls for after all a wooden shoe was not a novelty in Pelma.

"Can you make anything of the code?" Katrina asked in bewilderment.

"It looks to me as if it is the same rail-fence arrangement which Mr. Gershin explained. Oh, dear, I wonder if I have brains enough to figure it out myself now that I know the key."

"Would a paper and pencil help?"

"Yes, can you get them?"

Katrina ran to a little shop at the corner of the square, returning five minutes later with the required articles. Patty then wrote out the two scrambled words taken from the underside of the shoe:

"etynalwom sriwlro"

While Katrina peered over her shoulder, she broke the words into the rail-fence arrangement:

“e t y n a l w o m
s r i w l n r o ”

“Why, that doesn’t make sense to me,” Katrina said in disappointment after she had studied the paper for several minutes.

“It doesn’t seem to be right,” Patty admitted ruefully. According to the key one would have ‘estryin’—”

She broke off and for a moment stared at the paper. Then she gave a triumphant cry.

“Why, it does make sense, Katrina—all except the first word, and I think I know the explanation for that too. Listen! It should read like this:

“‘estry in wall n. w. room’”

“You believe that the word ‘estry’ may mean tapestry?” Katrina inquired eagerly. “But Patty, this clue contradicts our findings on the other shoe, which told us that the tapestries were secreted in a bed.”

“That’s the way we interpreted the cipher, but we must have been wrong.”

“I suspect Hans Vandervort was playing a joke on everyone,” Katrina declared after a moment’s thought. “It was silly enough to think the tapestries could be hidden in a bed, but it’s very nearly as ludicrous to assume they were secreted in a wall. One would need

to tear down half the house to accomplish anything like that."

"I have it!" Patty cried, springing up from the bench. "When Hans Vandervort wrote out the code he had both shoes and he must have placed them side by side. See, I'll show you what I mean."

Taking the pencil and paper she drew a rough sketch of a pair of wooden shoes, and on their soles lettered in the words:

"tap estry
secreted in wall n.w.
bed room."

"There you have your complete message as Hans Vandervort intended it," she declared gleefully. "Reading from the right to left shoe: 'tapestry secreted in wall N. W. bedroom.'"

"The northwest room of the old house is the one Hans occupied!" Katrina exclaimed. "But how could the tapestries be hidden in the wall?"

"Every house has empty spaces between the boards. Katrina, that must be where the tapestries are hidden!"

"Then we'll never recover them," Katrina said with a moan. "The boarding would have to be torn off, and the house isn't even ours any more."

"It is until the sale!"

"Oh, but it's due to start almost any minute now. What can we do, Patty?"

"Isn't there anyone who would help us? Your father—?"

"He will not be at home now. Mother and Father planned to leave before the sale and not return until it was over."

"Then we must investigate that northwest bedroom ourselves!" Patty announced determinedly. "We'll have to get a saw."

"I can find one in the tool shed, but to smuggle it upstairs into that old house with so many persons about—is it possible?"

"In a crowd no one notices anything," Patty assured her.

"If we saw a hole in the wall, we're apt to get into serious trouble."

"Do you want to lose the Beauvis tapestries, Katrina?"

"No, I'll risk almost anything to save them."

"Then let's not stand here trying to think of future trouble," Patty said, catching her friend by the hand. "We must work quickly."

The girls ran all the way to the Vandervort cottage. It was nearly time for the auction sale to start and the grounds of the old brick dwelling to the rear of the cottage were crowded with people. In loyalty to William Vandervort and his wife, few persons from Pelma were on hand but many outsiders from nearby towns had arrived.

"I'll go on over to the house and be looking around," Patty told Katrina. "Get the saw and meet me in the northwest bedroom."

She walked swiftly through the Vandervort garden and mingled with the crowd. As she pushed her way toward the rear door of the house which was open so that all might inspect the property, she heard many casual remarks concerning the value of the place.

"It will not sell for five hundred dollars," ventured one man. "You couldn't give it to me at any figure."

Patty caught a glimpse of Carl Vandervort and it occurred to her why he had returned to the Inn for his checkbook. The man meant to buy the homestead.

"He is aware that the tapestries are hidden somewhere in the house!" she thought. "He hopes to buy them in for a mere trifle."

Carl Vandervort was engaged in earnest conversation with a man whom Patty recognized as the out-of-town contractor. Recalling Katrina's suspicions regarding an agreement between the pair, she deliberately approached them without heralding her arrival.

"I don't want to appear as a bidder," she heard Carl tell his companion. "I'll give you a ten per cent commission to buy in the house for me. You ought to get it for five hundred or less."

Patty had no time to linger. She quickly passed the two men without being noticed and entered the house.

"I was right!" she told herself. "Carl does think

the tapestries are hidden in the house, but he may not be certain of it. Even though the wooden shoe was in his possession he might not have solved the code."

Only a few persons were wandering about in the house for the auctioneer had sent out a warning call that the sale was about to begin. The upper floor was entirely deserted.

Patty entered the northwest bedroom and closed the door. As she gazed about she began to realize how futile this last minute search was apt to prove. The sale was starting and Katrina had not even come with the saw. Even with the tool at hand, neither of the girls would be able to use it effectively.

Even as Patty lost heart she noticed a peculiar bulge in the wall paper near the fireplace. She scarcely dared hope that it had any significance, yet in the absence of Katrina it was the only thing she could investigate.

Noticing an old nail on the floor she picked it up and dug a tiny hole in the thick, imported paper. Patty's pulse quickened. The nail had scratched against something hard. She thrust a finger into the hole and felt—the unmistakable piling of tapestry!

Frantically Patty tore a larger hole until she could clearly see the white background of the silken cloth. There could be no mistake. She had found the famous Beauvis tapestries! For decades they had remained hidden behind the wall covering.

Before Patty had fully recovered from astonishment, she heard footsteps on the stairway. Katrina rushed into the bedroom.

"Oh, Patty, I cannot get a saw," she cried before her friend could speak. "Besides, it is too late for the sale is starting."

"Katrina, I've already found the tapestries! See!"

Patty indicated the tiny hole which she had made in the paper. She did not wish to enlarge it further, fearing that other persons who might enter the room would learn the secret which the old house had guarded so faithfully.

"Oh, Patty!" Katrina could find no other words to express her great astonishment and joy.

But the next instant she had thrust her finger into the opening and was feeling a bit of the exposed tapestry.

"You are right!" she cried exultingly. "It is a genuine Beauvis I am certain! The white background assures its value."

"I knew we'd solve the old wooden shoe code and recover the property!" Patty laughed triumphantly. "Your family will be rich!"

The light suddenly died from Katrina's blue eyes while Patty's smile faded away. Through the open window came the auctioneer's booming voice as he harangued the crowd, asking for a high opening bid on the old Vandervort house.

No one seemed eager to make an offer. Then a voice shouted: "Two hundred!" and the sale was on.

"I wish now we'd never found the tapestries," Katrina said with a little moan. "We had all reconciled ourselves to their loss. To discover them only to have them knocked down for a few hundred dollars—"

"Maybe we can still get them out from behind the paper, Katrina."

"It will take hours of work, Patty, for the tapestries must be handled carefully. In ten more minutes this house won't belong to us."

"If only someone could bid it in for your father—"

"There is no one at this late hour."

Patty crossed to the window, staring gloomily down at the crowd in the yard. Carl Vandervort had taken a position close to the auctioneer. Some distance away was the contractor who had made the first bid on the house.

Among the sea of strange faces, Patty suddenly distinguished her father and mother. Too late she remembered her appointment to meet them at the Inn! But that omission was of small consequence now. Somehow the tapestries must be saved for the Vandervort family, and no one could help unless it was her father.

"Come, Katrina!" she cried, pulling the girl toward the door. "The tapestries aren't lost yet! We must stop the sale!"

CHAPTER XX

TREASURED WALLS

"WE CAN'T possibly halt the sale now," Katrina declared as Patty half pulled her down the steep stairway. "If we disclose our knowledge of the hidden tapestries legal complications are almost certain to develop."

Patty acknowledged the truth of this and instantly abandoned her hazy plan of trying to appeal to the auctioneer. Her father would have to help her—there was no other way.

As the girls reached the yard they heard the contractor make another bid for the property, raising his price to four hundred and fifty dollars.

"Four hundred fifty!" shouted the auctioneer, his gaze roving over the crowd. "Who will give five hundred? Five hundred?"

Only silence greeted the appeal. The auctioneer tried for several minutes to cajole the crowd into more active bidding, and then, discouraged, raised his hammer to knock down the property to the contractor.

Patty and Katrina, pushing their way toward Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, halted, their gaze upon the auction-

eer. They were defeated! Patty suddenly lost her head. Without stopping to think she cried shrilly:

"Five hundred!"

At the sound of her voice every face seemed to turn in her direction. Patty became the focal point for fifty pair of eyes. Somewhere in the crowd a man laughed. The auctioneer did not seem to know what to do. He looked squarely at Patty, asking in a somewhat puzzled tone if she had made the bid.

"Yes, sir," Patty replied bravely. She was quaking inwardly for out of the tail of her eye she could see her father moving swiftly toward her and it was evident that he was more than annoyed.

"Are you of legal age?" questioned the auctioneer.

At this the crowd laughed, and a deep flush spread over Patty's face. Her father reached her side.

"Patty Rose, what are you trying to do?" he asked in irritation. "You can't buy this old place."

"Oh, Dad, please bid it in for me," Patty pleaded, and in a lower voice she added urgently: "The Beauvis tapestries are hidden inside the house and they *must* be saved!"

"Patty, you are being carried away by the excitement of the sale—"

"No, no, we have seen the tapestries!"

Mr. Saunders was completely bewildered for he knew nothing of the real situation. His daughter's earnest appeal and the fact that she was now the target for

considerable amusement tended to sway his better judgment.

The contractor, who had grown impatient at the delay, complained loudly to the auctioneer, demanding that the sale go on.

"I will take over my daughter's bid," Mr. Saunders announced unexpectedly.

A ripple of comment ran through the crowd. Persons who resided in Pelma actually beamed for William Vandervort was popular in the community and his neighbors wished to see the property sell for a high price. Many assumed that Patty wished to buy the house because of her attachment for Katrina.

"Five hundred—" began the auctioneer, but the contractor cut him short by raising the bid to five hundred and fifty dollars.

Everyone now gazed questioningly at Mr. Saunders who was fidgeting uncomfortably. He did not wish to acquire the house.

"Buy it at any price, Dad!" Patty muttered in his ear. "That man over there is bidding for Carl Vandervort."

"Six hundred!" shouted Mr. Saunders.

The contractor immediately raised to seven hundred, a jump which caused the crowd to gasp. Mr. Saunders, warming to the battle, offered another fifty which again was raised by a hundred, although the contractor hesitated briefly before calling out the figure.

"Nine hundred," Mr. Saunders shouted, and then in an undertone murmured to his daughter: "We've both lost our senses. I'll not go a penny higher."

But the resolve was promptly forgotten when the contractor after a frantic glance cast at Carl Vandervort whose face was as black as a thunder cloud, raised the bid to nine hundred and twenty-five. He impulsively added another fifty dollars.

"Nine seventy-five!" the auctioneer called, watching the contractor hopefully. "Make it a thousand?"

The contractor glanced questioningly at Carl Vandervort. The man made a signal which was interpreted as in the negative.

"Nine seventy-five," the auctioneer shouted in a last futile appeal. "Going-going-sold to this gentleman over here for nine seventy-five."

"One thousand," cried Carl Vandervort, but his bid came too late. The auctioneer regretfully repeated that the house had been sold, and that the bidding was officially closed.

Carl Vandervort made a muttered retort, and the girls saw him engaging in a bitter argument with the contractor.

Patty's elation was brief, for as the clerk of the auction came to take down Mr. Saunderson's name and address, she was assailed with a hundred doubts. What if the tapestries should not prove to be of anticipated quality? There was a very real danger that while they

might be genuine Beauvis, the silk had been damaged by storage.

The crowd was beginning to break up, and many persons passing close to Patty remarked that the property was not worth half the price paid. Mr. Saunders bit his lip nervously, a habit to which he reverted in moments of stress.

Mrs. Saunders joined her husband, appearing somewhat stunned by his action.

"I don't know why you did it," she murmured. "We shall be the laughing stock of Pelma."

"The last laugh will be ours," Patty declared, her confidence returning. "Wait until the crowd has gone and I will show you!"

Unobserved by the girls, Carl Vandervort approached. He bowed stiffly to Mrs. Saunders, ignored Katrina, and addressed himself to Mr. Saunders.

"Sir," he said, "if I may judge, you seem to regret your hasty bargain. If you wish to dispose of the place I will take it from you at the final bid of nine hundred and seventy-five dollars."

Mr. Saunders gazed at the man, and a certain eagerness in his eyes convinced him that he had made no mistake in listening to Patty's plea.

"No, thank you," he replied evenly. "I'll stand by my bargain."

"You may regret your decision," Carl Vandervort said snappishly, and turning, walked angrily away.

Late that afternoon when the grounds of the old homestead were entirely deserted, Patty and Katrina conducted the Saunders and the little Vandervort family to the northwest bedroom. A long strip of wallpaper was torn from the wall.

Mrs. Saunders gasped as she saw the exposed length of tapestry. Save for a few disfiguring patches of starch from the wall covering, the silken cloth was in perfect condition, the colors as true as the day they had been created.

"Oh, it is gorgeous!" Mrs. Saunders exclaimed.
"So rich!"

"And the shades are like the colors of a rainbow,"
Mrs. Vandervort added. "Red, blue, violet, pale green,
with a border of gold."

For a long while the group stood admiring the treasure.

"It reminds one of a painting by an old master,"
Katrina declared. "I wonder what the picture represents? I would judge that it had been taken from mythology."

"Do you suppose the tapestry is a genuine Beauvis?"
Mr. Saunders asked.

"Oh, I feel certain of it," Katrina answered confidently. "The ground is white, the material is silk and on the underside of the border, the Beauvis name has been woven."

"Aren't you glad you bought the house, Dad?"

Patty laughed triumphantly. "I suspect the walls are lined solidly with priceless tapestries. Our search has only begun."

Everyone fell to work stripping off the wallpaper. Soon four large tapestries, each with a white ground, were released from their hiding place. Other bedrooms were examined, but they revealed no additional treasure.

"Even these four tapestries represent a fortune!" Katrina cried gaily. "In my opinion they comprise a set, and that should add to the value."

Not until long after dark could the tapestries be removed from the house for the Vandervorts did not wish anyone to learn of the discovery until they were ready to announce it. The rich wall coverings were carefully folded and temporarily stored in the attic of the cottage. It was Mr. Vandervort's plan to have them appraised by an expert as soon as possible.

Shortly after nine o'clock everyone gathered in the cosy Vandervort kitchen for a snack of sandwiches and hot chocolate. There the men quietly talked over what disposition should be made of the tapestries after their value had been determined. Mr. Saunders made it clear that while he had purchased the old homestead he had no intention of claiming any of the Vandervort possessions.

"If you will repurchase the house from me that is all I request," he declared.

"We will be so happy to get it back again," Mrs. Vandervort replied. "We expect to triple the price you paid for it, and when the tapestries are sold, you and your daughter must take a portion of the money."

"Thank you, kindly, but we must refuse," Mr. Saunders answered firmly.

Before Mrs. Vandervort could urge the matter, there came a knock on the front door. Katrina who went to open it, hastened back to whisper that the caller was Carl Vandervort.

"Shall I admit him, Father?"

"Yes," directed Mr. Vandervort after a slight hesitation, "it will be wise to discuss our differences frankly, for in some ways I fear we have wronged the young man."

Patty and Katrina eyed one another uneasily for they suspected the purpose of Carl's call. Very likely he had discovered that the wooden shoe was missing from his hotel room.

In this supposition they were entirely correct. Upon returning to the Inn, the man had noticed at once that the shoe was gone, and it did not require great reasoning power upon his part to deduct that Patty and Katrina were responsible for his undoing.

"You are right, we did take the wooden shoe," Katrina admitted truthfully, when faced with the accusation. "Perhaps we should not have entered your

room, but you cannot deny that you came to our home to acquire the mate to that same shoe!"

"Are you accusing me again of stealing your money?" the man asked sarcastically.

"No, I owe you an apology for blaming you for the theft," Katrina returned. "I know now that while you came to our home to take the wooden shoe, you did not mean to steal our money."

"I did not take the shoe either."

"Only because some other person made off with it before you had the opportunity!"

"We may as well have an understanding," Carl said coldly. "While we may not care for one another we have certain interests in common—"

"Such as the Beauvis tapestries?" Katrina inquired dryly.

"Yes, I admit I came to Pelma to learn what had become of them. Some months ago, a wooden shoe left originally by my ancestor, Carl Vandervort, fell into my hands. After a great deal of trouble I was able to solve part of the code—enough to learn that the tapestries are hidden somewhere in the old house."

The Vandervorts and their guests remained discreetly silent, and after looking shrewdly from one to another, Carl continued:

"I am not a stupid man. I understand that Mr. Saunders bid in the house solely because Katrina and

her friend, after taking my wooden shoe—learned the hiding place of the tapestries. However, it is not my purpose to quarrel over the manner in which the information was obtained. I only ask that you share the treasure with me. We are kinsmen, and my claim to the tapestries is equal to your own."

"Had you come to me in the first place, openly stating your mission here, I should have been only too glad to share any possible findings with you," Mr. Vandervort replied coldly. "It is now too late."

"Are you aware, sir, that I have definite legal rights?"

"Show him the paper we found in the secretary, Katrina," Patty urged.

The girl ran upstairs, returning in a moment with the paper which had been signed by Hans Vandervort's brother, Carl.

"As you may read, this paper gives the descendants of our line full title to the Beauvis tapestries," Katrina's father said evenly.

Carl stared at the letter as if unable to believe his own eyes. For a moment he was too stunned to speak.

"This should end the matter I believe," William Vandervort said.

Carl nodded, and muttering to himself, turned as if he meant to leave. Katrina darted to the fireplace and snatching up the wooden shoe which had been taken from the hotel room, thrust it into his hand.

Carl hurled the shoe into a far corner, exclaiming

angrily: "I wish I had never set eyes upon it—or you!"

He banged out of the house and could be seen walking rapidly down the street. Katrina rescued the wooden shoe and started to set it beside its mate on the hearth. Changing her mind, she placed it impulsively in Patty's hand.

"This is for you," she declared. "It is a memento of our adventure."

Patty was delighted at the gift and thanked Katrina profusely. Although the hour was growing late, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders insisted that they must return to Dalton that night, and begged Mrs. Vandervort to allow Katrina to spend a week with them as Patty's guest. Permission was readily granted and the girls hurriedly packed Katrina's bag.

It was long after midnight when the party finally reached Dalton. Lights were burning in the Saunders residence and Jack could be seen pacing up and down the living room.

Patty assumed that her brother was worried over the family's prolonged absence, but it developed that he had enjoyed an adventure which rivaled her own.

"Say, things have sure been popping since you left!" he greeted Patty. "You know the Saxon City police have been keeping watch of the Elias Parkson house!"

"Yes, what happened?"

"Well, tonight they caught two fellows trying to break in. Darrell Jennings and a man named Claude

Farlow. The police took me to Saxon City and I identified them as the two men who stopped at Hank's garage. They want you to make an identification too."

"Tonight?"

"No, in the morning. You're to go to the station right after breakfast."

Katrina and Patty enjoyed little sleep that night, for after relating their own story, it was nearly two o'clock. Even when they went to bed they lay side by side whispering until the chirp of sparrows on the eaves warned them that dawn had come.

Patty and Katrina arose early, and feeling little the worse for their sleepless night, ate breakfast and then drove with Jack to the Saxon City jail. There they both identified Darrell Jennings as the pickpocket who had accosted old Mr. Wittenstine during the Dutch festival. Jewels taken from the Rainey home had been found in the man's possession as well as a large sum of money.

The little booklet which Patty had picked up in the Brighton woods linked Claude Farlow with the burglary cases, for the handwriting was proven to be his. The girls felt confident that the two men were responsible for the theft of the Vandervort money, but it was not until after several hours of grilling that Darrell Jennings offered a complete confession.

Prior to the Dutch festival he had visited Pelma, and from accidental contact with a talkative chimney re-

pairman, had learned of the cleverly concealed shelf in the Vandervort home. It was generally rumored about the village that the family savings were hidden in the chimney, and Jennings confirmed his suspicions by adroitly questioning Peter, whose young innocence was no match for the man's cunning. The name of William Vandervort had been entered in the little booklet as a promising victim.

The festival at Pelma had drawn the two men back to the locality. Awaiting his opportunity, Claude Farlow had entered the Vandervort house late at night by means of an unlocked door.

Once inside, the matter of locating the wooden shoe had been simple, for his confederate had given minute details as to the location of the secret shelf. Swiftly and silently he had glided from the house into a waiting automobile.

As the car drove away, the men had rifled the wooden shoe of its contents. Pocketing the money, they had tossed the shoe from the window and it had rolled into the ditch to be found later by Mrs. Harrison.

But from Katrina's standpoint the most interesting bit of information was that a large sum of money had been found upon Darrel Jennings' person, and the man acknowledged it to be part of the Vandervort stolen funds. The lost savings would be restored.

A detailed check-up with the officers of other nearby counties enabled the Saxon City police to establish

that the two men had robbed more than a dozen homes in the past six months. Fearful of being captured with the loot, they had made one attempt to bury it in the woods, only to be frightened away when Patty and Gladys Baker had witnessed their actions.

Following several hours spent at the station, the girls were very glad to return to Dalton. For days they were content to do little more than read and idle about the house. However, neither could relax completely until word came from Pelma that the Beauvis tapestries had been examined by an expert, and were worth far more than the Vandervorts had dared hope.

"I still think it's a miracle that we ever looked beneath the wall paper," Patty remarked musingly. "I shudder when I realize how close we came to losing those tapestries forever."

"So do I," Katrina agreed. "I don't know why I never thought to examine the walls of the old house, for I should have guessed that the tapestries were there."

"How could you have known?"

"Hans Vandervort merely appropriated an idea which was fairly common in Holland early in the nineteenth century during the three years that Napoleon held sway. Wealthy families were taxed as high as one third upon their personal property. Many persons felt that the tax was unjust and tried to hide their belongings from the *taxateurs* by secreting them

in the walls of their homes and various other hiding places."

"It was a clever idea, no matter who thought of it first," Patty said. She was silent for a moment before she asked: "Katrina, do you remember that day not so long ago when I asked you what you would do if ever the Beauvis tapestries were recovered?"

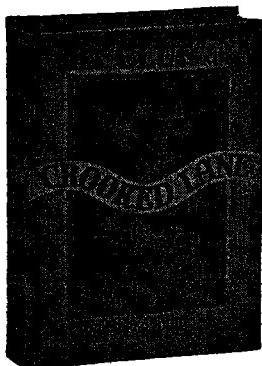
Katrina nodded happily.

"Yes, I remember the day very well. But so much has happened since then that I have lost all trace of time. It seems a long time ago."

"Doesn't it?" Patty Rose agreed, falling into her companion's mood. "Who ever could have guessed that our chance meeting at Pelma would mean so much to both of us?"

"It has meant everything to me," Katrina said, trying to keep her voice steady. "Our home; father's future; a chance in life for Peter. Oh, Patty, how can I repay you for all you have done? I have given you nothing for you will accept only the wooden shoe."

"Nevertheless, I value that shoe highly," Patty replied, reaching out to clasp her friend's hand. "And you're quite wrong in saying you have given me nothing. Your friendship is the richest gift of all, Katrina. I shall treasure it always."



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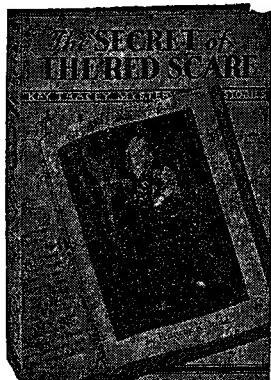
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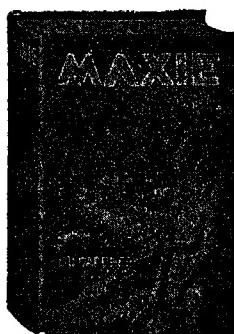
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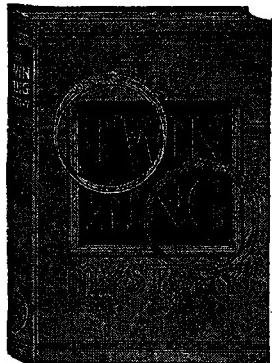
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